

446.

BOLSHEVISM

*Mr. Keeling's
Five Years in Russia*

BY

H. V. KEELING

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO
HODDER AND STOUGHTON

MCMXIX

• DK265
K35

154585

PREFACE

THE narrative of Mr. Keeling which appears in the following pages is bound to excite the interest of a large number of people ; it is the first hand evidence, direct and explicit, of a *bonâ fide* English workman who has lived and worked with Russian peasants and town factory employees for the last five years.

In the ordinary way no question of his credibility would ever arise, but it so happens that the strongest political passions are aroused by the direct and implied conclusion to which his story leads.

When first introduced to Mr. Keeling, I had the greatest difficulty in consciously believing much that he said, and I do not

Preface

think I should ever have given complete credence unless I had seen the man and tested him inside and out.

I mention this in no personal sense, but simply because I happen to be in the same boat as most of my Labour friends, who felt that the Russian Revolution has never had a fair chance. This, together with the cumulative effect of a four and a-half years' censorship, distorted news and the drop in the value of official statements, has produced an atmosphere of suspicion which takes a long time to dislodge. At the moment, statements of first class public importance backed by incontrovertible evidence are regarded with either indifference or suspicion of motive.

In times of public stress this is the more unfortunate, because it often prevents the right thing being done; men and women are playing with the ideas of Bolshevism without in the least knowing what it means in practice, being content to see it through the hazy mists of meaningless Decrees, which look, on the face of

Preface

them, that a new heaven and earth for the workman has arrived.

It will be noticed throughout that Mr. Keeling makes no attack on the theory of Bolshevism, he is only concerned with what he saw of its day by day practice. He pleads hard and strongly for help from the men of England and the United States for the unfortunate Russian workman whose fortunes are now at their nadir and who have lost the power of helping themselves.

Among the many reasons for presenting this book to the public is the desire to escape from the constant attempts to use only part of his story for political propaganda. No party is quite clear of this charge.

In order that there may be no doubt of the exact position it ought to be at once stated that neither Mr. Keeling nor myself have received one single penny from any Government source, neither are we in the employ or pay of any political organisation. The whole thing is an individual effort.

Preface

Mr. Keeling has been interviewed by several individual persons and by a certain number of Labour Organisations; he has also been seen by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Unionist Party. He has delivered one lecture at Hampshire House Club, Hammersmith. That is the sum total of his activities.

For the introduction to the Labour groups in the Provinces and in Scotland I was responsible, believing that it would be of great advantage to those who I know are keen on Russian affairs to have a chance to see Mr. Keeling and get his story first hand.

In most cases there was the same old difficulty of getting credence, followed by a generous attitude after the first half hour. In one or two cases theoretical Bolsheviks thought they were defending Russian Bolshevism by being rude to Mr. Keeling, but these were fortunately unimportant exceptions.

I was present throughout all these interviews and took some hundreds of

Preface

notes ; it is from these notes, together with a continuous collaboration with Mr. Keeling, that the book is compiled. In every case the exact words of Mr. Keeling are used, not the slightest attempt has been made to colour or distort anything, and if one's word counts at all I ought to add that although I have heard Mr. Keeling telling his story under all kinds of conditions, in friendly and unfriendly atmospheres and in the close questioning of long-extended private conversation, I have never detected the slightest variation in his story.

The hostile attitude of some of the irreconcilables has occasionally made him impatient, indeed tempted him into saying, "I wish they would go and live under the Bolsheviks for a time."

Mr. Keeling's great idea is to get help for the Russian friends he left behind, and he makes a few tentative suggestions of how it might be done. He hates the idea of sending soldiers, and would do anything to escape from such a conclusion ;

Preface

but he is quite sure that the English workman ought to act in the name of common humanity; he believes that if they could see for themselves what is happening they would not tolerate the reign of the present Bolshevik Government for another day. He bluntly describes it as the ascendancy of the lowest and most ignorant class in Russia. The people at the top, Lenin and Lunarcharsky in particular, he describes as idealists who have been compelled to see their ideas carried out by ruffians who have not the remotest conception what Communism means.

The danger is that people in England may confuse the avowed ideals of the Russian Communist with what is actually happening; for this confusion Mr. Keeling provides the only antidote which ought to be listened to. The form in which the book appears prevents me from giving more than a slight picture in which to convey the strength of character, virility and unquenchable vivacity of the man; in many respects he fully represents the

Preface

kind of man one loves to think of as a typical indomitable, untheoretical English mechanic. Mr. Keeling is willing to speak at a limited number of conferences and answer questions. Letters on this matter should be sent to the writer.

E. H. HAYWOOD.

BURGESS HILL, SUSSEX.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	V
CHAPTER I	
CREDENTIALS	15
CHAPTER II	
THE ESCAPE	23
CHAPTER III	
NORMAL LIFE IN RUSSIAN TOWNS AND VILLAGES	32
CHAPTER IV	
THE MARCH REVOLUTION	74
CHAPTER V	
THE BOLSHEVIK COUP	103
CHAPTER VI	
BOLSHEVISM AT WORK	127

Contents

CHAPTER VII	PAGE
FACTORIES AND TRADE UNIONS . . .	153
CHAPTER VIII	
HOW THE BOLSHEVIKS KEEP IN POWER.	167
CHAPTER IX	
BOLSHEVISM AND SOCIAL LIFE . . .	187
APPENDIX	
THE THEORY OF BOLSHEVISM . . .	199

BOLSHEVISM

CHAPTER I

CREDENTIALS

I HAVE just left Northern Russia after a sojourn of five years, during which time I earned my living by working at my own trade or as a jobbing mechanic. I have also been officially employed by the Soviet Government as a photographer under the direction of Lunarcharsky, the Education Minister of the Bolsheviks.

I can truthfully say that I have never written a book or made a speech in my life before ; but many people have told me that a first-hand account of what I have seen in Russia would be appreciated, so with the assistance of a friend this book is offered to the public.

Credentials

It is surprising to me that so many are interested in what is taking place in Russia. I could perhaps better have understood this interest two years ago, but now one has become so accustomed and hardened to plots, counter-plots, murders, lynching and revolutions generally, that it becomes something of a shock to find such things unusual.

Being a reasonably healthy man, it was possible for me to do and face things which I could never have done had I been physically weak. Indeed otherwise I should have never seen Old England again.

When I eventually returned I thought all that was necessary was to tell my story to the Labour movement and at once it would set to work to help the starving and despairing Russian workmen whom I had left behind. At night I often lie awake thinking of the poor men and women, yes and children too, whom I saw every day in December last dying of hunger and exhaustion in the snow-covered streets. The picture haunts me, and I can hardly forget the terrible scenes for a moment,

Credentials

yet here I have found an atmosphere so charged with suspicion that it is only with an effort I can gain credence. Will the reader forgive me for at once stating my own credentials?

For twenty-five years I have been a member of the Litho Artists and Engravers' Society, and in my own town have been an active member of this trade union. About twelve years ago I played a leading part in raising our minimum wage from 38s. to 50s. per week, and at the time I left England was the Vice-President of our London branch. All the time I was in Russia I kept up my membership, paying the subscriptions through my wife, and on my return to England at once reported myself to our secretary.

Whilst in Russia under the Tsar's *régime* I did what was possible to explain to the Russian workmen with whom I came into contact how our trade unions were organised, and this at a time when it was by no means a safe thing to do. However, the rest must speak for itself.

In February, 1914, a London firm sent me to Russia to assist in setting up a

Credentials

patent photo-litho process in St. Petersburg which they had sold to a Russian company. The reason for my being sent out was, I suppose, the fact that I had a fair acquaintance with the German language, which I had learned in my spare time, principally in order to be able to read the many books on technical photography which were not to be found in our own language. My job was to act as interpreter and to help to instruct the Russian workmen (several of whom spoke German) in the details of the process.

For a year I "carried on." Having learned to like Russia and the Russians I decided to stay and find fresh work. The majority of the mechanical engineers to the printing trade were Germans, and as most of these were either interned or repatriated, I had no difficulty in finding repair work in many towns in Russia. My area seems by chance to have been confined to that part of Russia where the Bolsheviks have been most active and which is now under Bolshevik rule.

Little by little I grew to speak the

Credentials

language more fluently, and as I had practically no friends other than Russian workmen, it will be readily understood how I came to know what were actually the thoughts of the average Russian. I was seldom if ever without an invitation to spend an evening or a week end, or one of their numerous holidays, with some member of the most hospitable people that it would be possible to meet. A real Russian will literally share his last crust with one who accepts his hospitality, and right down to the day I left Petrograd, when all except the members of the Red Army and some of the favoured members of the Soviets were in the grip of a terrible hunger, they invariably managed to scrape something together for a visitor, if only to show their desire to be hospitable. I feel sure the Russian is hurt more by not being able to provide a meal for his friends than he is by being starved himself.

I worked in Russia throughout the trying period of the war, and witnessed the first great revolution and the other changes which followed, and can testify to the fact

Credentials

that amongst the mass of the people with whom I came in contact there remains, in spite of the most awful distress, nothing but the kindest feeling towards the fellow workmen in England and elsewhere.

The natural Russian, whether in town or country, never fails to accord a kind welcome to any stranger who is prepared to be content with the best they can offer. I left Russia in January of this year—why, you will gather as the story proceeds, at the moment I will content myself by saying that although I was the chief photographer to the Committee of Public Education, with a salary of 1,500 roubles per month, a sum which at the pre-war rate of exchange was more than £150, and that this was the highest salary paid to expert workmen, I was utterly unable to keep myself from slow starvation. At that time I had little idea of what was happening outside Soviet Russia and had received no letter from my wife or friends for over a year.

Although a keen trade unionist, I have never been an active political partisan.

Credentials

except perhaps at election times, when the labour candidate was always sure of what service I could render. My chief interest has always been in my work, and I would much rather be at the bench than writing this book.

I have been asked several times why I am undertaking this apparently unpopular task ; the reason must be plain to all but the wilfully blind. I have left a country where the conditions are so terrible and where I have so many friends—all workmen and peasants—that I should indeed be a coward, and wanting in the first elements of simple gratitude, if I were quietly and meekly to settle down to my own work without at least making an attempt to place the facts before those whom I know are being deceived by the irresponsible talk of those who have never personally experienced the actual results of Bolshevism in action. It is very easy for those who have obtained their knowledge of Bolshevism through reading of the Decrees, or whilst living as the guests of the Higher Soviet, to relate wonderful fairy tales of magnificent ideals, but what

Credentials

I have to relate are the actual facts and results personally witnessed and experienced by one who was regarded and treated in every way as a workman of the first category.

facts and
nd experi-
nd treated
f the first

CHAPTER II

THE ESCAPE

MANY who have read the preceding chapter will perhaps wonder why I stayed so long under such conditions. The answer is that one is seldom without hope, and the whole business seemed such a nightmare, that I should have to be insane to believe that it could continue for long. As will be seen later, I was able to render many services in consequence of being a mechanic, and being an Englishman I did not think it was up to me to run away the instant trouble arose.

I was in a relatively privileged position, being paid at the highest rate given to workmen, and, like everyone else, I had been hoping from day to day that something would happen to free us from the misery we suffered. It was not possible to secure passports, because, being of military age, I was liable to be conscripted for the Red

The Escape

Guards. In December, 1918, I applied several times for permission to leave, but was refused on each occasion. There was therefore nothing left but to make a bid for food and freedom by dispensing with the usual formalities.

After careful thought I decided to get away if possible during the time of the old Russian Christmas—January 6 according to our calendar. I calculated that this would be the most favourable time, notwithstanding the fact that the Soviet Government had attempted to do away with the Church holidays and the Old Style Calendar; I knew the average Russian would celebrate the holidays, no matter how many Decrees forbade him doing so. Quite why the Bolsheviks handicapped themselves by interfering with the calendar I could never make out, unless they were copying the example of the French revolutionists. The reason for selecting the holiday time was the not unnatural suspicion that the watch on the Finnish frontier would be less strict than usual.

As it turned out, I was not able to get

The Escape

away until the second day after the festival—a festival indeed held, but only a spectre of its former self.

My plan was to make the attempt alone and to cross the frontier at a point about sixty miles north of Petrograd and a little to the east. This I thought would be the safest spot for such a venture, judging from the information I had been able to gather. I was informed that that part of the Finnish frontier which lies nearest to Petrograd was being watched with very great and increasing strictness ; to cross it was more than risky. Every inch of the way must be done on foot for even had I been able to get a permit to travel by train out of Petrograd, the train would assuredly have been a death trap. I had an excellent map, bought some years before, and after minutely studying the route I collected together a few of the most necessary things, which included a compass, an electric torch, a pair of wire nippers, a pair of skis and my trusty revolver.

At seven o'clock on a dark cold morning I left my lodgings in Petrograd with a

The Escape

small knapsack on my back and carry a pair of skis and poles. It was quite dark, hardly anyone was to be seen, the Red Guards were not in evidence and to my great satisfaction there were no light lamps in the streets. As I crossed the Troitsky Bridge I looked back on the building which once contained the British Embassy and noticed lights in two of the upper stories. For a moment the thought crossed my mind that perhaps some representative of my own country might be there, and I half turned with the idea of applying for assistance so that I might leave Russia by a less hazardous route. With a rueful laugh I remembered that there was no one there and that the only way out was the one I was taking.

Before it was really light I was nearly out of the town and much less liable to attract attention; my skis were the immediate danger, for skis had all been requisitioned by the authorities some time before. Besides being troublesome to drag along, they were just the things to invite the unwelcome questions of a soldier or sentry. It was because I knew of the

The Escape

risks which would befall me by walking on the main roads that I took the skis at all, it was my intention to use them so soon as I got within twenty or thirty miles of the frontier. It would then, I thought, be possible to complete the journey over the trackless snow, which lay from one to six feet deep across the marshes and forests. As it turned out the skis were a useless burden, and would have been better left behind.

Thinking it would be comparatively plain sailing until I arrived in the neighbourhood of the Finnish frontier, I was very dismayed when, turning up a long road not far from the end of the town, I saw a couple of sentries belonging to the Red Army walking towards me. I could neither turn back nor avoid passing them without exciting suspicion. On one side of me was a high wall, on the other open fields. There was nothing for it but to face them. As they drew nearer I noticed they were very young. I expected to be minutely questioned as to where I was going and how I came to be in possession of skis. At the least I expected to be

The Escape

compelled to return, even if lucky enough to escape being brought before the Commandant.

By the time we met I was feeling pretty nervous, so that when first accosted I did not realise what was being said. The sentry repeated his question, which, instead of being a challenge, was, "Have you any tobacco on you?" That was my cue. I replied that just at the moment I was unfortunately quite out of tobacco but that I was going to visit a friend who had some and that on my return in a couple of hours I would give him a share. They were so profuse in their thanks that I was almost ashamed to deceive them. I could see quite plainly that they could not think of anything but the possibility of soon being able to satisfy the craving which obsessed them. The absence of tobacco in Russia is a serious deprivation.

I had no accurate knowledge of the road, but was guided by my compass, and eventually struck one of the main roads north when about ten versts from Petrograd. I did not want to go by a main road, but could see no alternative for the time,

The Escape

so I trudged along trying to make myself as inconspicuous as possible. I was of course dressed more or less in the Russian fashion and wore a beard, which helped still further to give me the appearance of a Russian workman of the class to which my papers showed I belonged.

At the first cross roads the Red soldiers on duty eyed me rather questioningly, but my ordinary appearance and assumed tired gait evidently gave them the impression that I was not going far and they forebore to question me. Every time, and it was pretty frequent for the first thirty miles, that a group of soldiers of the Red Army walked or rode by, my heart was in my mouth, and I should have been glad if I could have left the main road to travel by some less frequented route. This, however, was impossible, because there had been a slight thaw a few days previously, and at this stage of the journey the skis were quite useless; there being plenty of holes in the marshes where the ice was not safe to cross. No one having questioned me, I felt a little more secure and knocked at the door of a tiny cottage

The Escape

about four o'clock in the afternoon and asked if they would let me rest a little. The occupants were Finns, a mother and her son. The boy, about eighteen years of age, had learned to speak Russian, though the mother could not understand a word of the language. They kindly offered to make tea and gave me some milk, a thing I had not tasted for months. To crown my joy they even found me some bread.

The young man explained that he was employed with others to dig trenches, and I learned that a row of these were to be found a little further on. There were two more rows at seven and fourteen versts nearer the Finnish frontier. I then realised for the first time that I should not be able to use my precious skis as I had intended. These trenches were in all parts except where the main road passed through them; they were flanked on both sides by barbed wire entanglements and were supposed to extend right across the country to Lake Ladoga. The boy mentioned that the road was guarded near the trenches, but probably not very closely, as the holidays were not really over.

The Escape

I did not, of course, reveal where I was going, simply remarking that I was on my way to spend a holiday with some friends in a village a little further on—the name of which I had learned from my map. After an hour's rest I started off again and soon arrived at the first trench. To my great relief there was no one on guard at the moment, the sentry who should have been there was evidently drinking tea at a cottage near by. I trudged along the straight white road for another couple of hours and then came to the second row of trenches. It was nearly dusk, only a special guard and a few women going home and carrying spades were to be seen. The barbed wire entanglements upon frames were at the side of the road ready to be placed across if necessary, but the trench itself had not been cut across the roadway. Here the character of the country changed. Instead of the flat, wide marshes thinly covered with trees, the surroundings became hilly and fairly well wooded, the road winding round amongst the hills.

Just as it became dark I came to a wooden

The Escape

bridge over a brawling river which was only partly frozen, and here the road took a sharp turn to the right. Noticing a footpath up the steep hill in front leading, as my compass showed me, in the direction I wished to go, I left the roadway and started to climb the hill. After a while the footpath ceased and I began to regret that I had not stuck to the road—it was very fatiguing work tramping through the knee-deep snow. I did not relish going back, so with the help of my compass pushed ahead for about half an hour until I saw a wooden building with a light burning inside lying over to my right. Not caring to risk too close a survey, I passed it at a safe distance, and a little while after again struck the road which I had left. I looked back and saw by the light from the window of the building I had passed that a barrier had been placed across the road where everyone was being stopped and examined.

Reflecting how lucky I had been after all in taking the footpath, I had hardly proceeded a quarter of a mile when a soldier of the Red Guard suddenly held

The Escape

me up. He seemed to appear from the shadow of a house and was armed with his Browning pistol. He asked, "Where was I going? where was my permit? how did I come to have a pair of skis with me?" And added that I must certainly see the Commandant. All the time he was talking my own loaded revolver, which I had always kept with me in spite of the many Decrees, was pointing at him over the top of my overcoat pocket. I was afraid to use it, because the noise might have brought a dozen men down on me, so although I felt pretty hopeless I resolved to try what could be done by persuasion. I told him I was going for a short holiday to a village a few miles further on, giving the same name that I had given to my young Finnish friend. I assured him that I had all the necessary permits, including one for the skis. "Very good," he replied, "we must go and see the Commandant and no doubt it will soon be settled."

Here I broke the conversation to tell him the latest news and asked how he found things out there. He told me he

The Escape

had been formerly employed in a factory in Petrograd, that it was rather tedious out there, but he did get plenty to eat. I interrupted him in an off-hand kind of way with a suggestion that as it was so late and my friend might have gone to bed it could perhaps be more simply arranged if I left my skis and knapsack with him until the morning, when I would return and see the Commandant.

Being, as I had already perceived, a naturally good-natured man, he after a moment's hesitation agreed. I begged him to take great care of the knapsack, which I declared I would not like to lose for a thousand roubles, so after receiving his assurance that my things would be all right until the morning I walked away. In a few moments I passed between the last line of trenches and barbed wire, hurrying on a little faster now that I was relieved of my baggage. I dare not deceive myself that I had escaped altogether; there were still twenty miles or so to cover before I could reach the frontier, also there was the risk of an attempt to bring me back. The sentry had mentioned that

The Escape

they were specially on the look out for people who were trying to cross the frontier on skis. I had laughed at the suggestion that I was thinking of any such thing, but thought it wiser to take into my calculation the possibility of someone else, if not the sentry, smelling a rat.

In less than half an hour I saw a small blacksmith's shop which was closed for the night. There was a path leading up to it, so I decided to see if I could rest in it for a while. With my wire nippers I managed to open one of the doors and had only just sat down inside and began to eat some of the pieces of black bread which I had bought when I heard a sleigh coming from the direction of the place I had recently passed through.

The night was rather light, the moon was somewhere behind the clouds and the white snow further helped to make things uncomfortably visible. I peered through the window, which looked on to the road, and saw a couple of soldiers or officers of the Red Army drive by. It was impossible to say whether they were looking for me or not, but I judged it best to give

The Escape

myself the benefit of the doubt. I decided to stay where I was for an hour or so and see if they returned.

This was not to be. In a few minutes I heard faintly in the distance the singing of a group of soldiers coming from the same direction. As they drew nearer I had to decide quickly whether I would stay where I was for several hours, until in fact the soldiers got tired of wandering about the roads, or get away in front of them and take the risk of meeting the returning sleigh. I much feared they were actually looking for me. Before it was too late I decided to risk the road and scrambled down into the track again just before the soldiers appeared round the last bend.

I hurried along as fast as I could go, the soldiers behind and the possibility of meeting the sleigh in front. There was very little chance of getting off the road to hide, even if my tracks did not betray me. Without my precious skis I should not be able to proceed far through the snow, which might prove to be anything up to six feet deep.

At last, after the most miserable hour

The Escape

I have ever spent in my life, I came to a fork in the road. With my electric torch I examined the ground and came to the conclusion that the sleigh had gone to the left. I took the right, hoping that the soldiers would also go to the left, but they did not. I was feeling so tired that I must have a rest somewhere. Turning up a small footpath in the woods at the side I came to a little barn, which I entered. I heard the soldiers approaching nearer and pass at the end of the footpath in about a quarter of an hour. Their songs suddenly ceased, so I stayed a little longer and then retraced my steps to the road. After walking for about twenty minutes I came near to a sort of guard-house brightly lit up: my singing soldiers were evidently inside and with them the men who, I presume, should have been on the look out.

Very carefully and with much trepidation I sidled past the building as close to the wall as possible, so as not to be too easily seen should anyone chance to be looking out. Again luck favoured me, and I got past unnoticed, but was too tired to feel any great thrill of joy—there was also the

The Escape

anxiety of my getting nearer to the frontier and the need for increasing care. In order to make sure, I hid myself whenever I heard or saw anyone approaching. Once a sleigh with two soldiers, whose voices I heard before it was visible, approached me. The road at this point was a high road some five feet above the marshy forests on either side; all I could do was to jump into the deep snow and crouch there until the sleigh with its soldiers had passed. I distinctly heard one of the soldiers say to his companion as they rode by me, "I saw someone in front a minute ago, where could he have gone to—or was it only a shadow?"

The sleigh passed and after it was out of sight I took to the road again. About three in the morning I lay down for a moment in the snow behind a shed where it was sheltered from the wind. I must have fallen asleep, for I woke up feeling suddenly cold in spite of my fur coat. I looked at my watch by the light of the torch and found that it was half past five. I hardly knew what to do. I felt I was somewhere near the frontier, how near I

The Escape

had no idea. I was afraid to go further on the main roads for fear of meeting some of the Guards, and now that my skis were gone I could not travel across the snow.

I tried two side paths and found in each case that they ended up at a cottage and that it was impossible to go further. I tried another side road running to the east, but as a matter of fact I did not know what to do and in addition to feeling cold, tired and miserable, I was beginning to think that I had had all my trouble for nothing and that I was to be imprisoned for ever in this dreadful circle.

I dragged myself along the side road—a side road that had been so little used that the new snow was half-way up to my knees. I kept going in this snow for quite two hours, and at last, just as it was beginning to get faintly light, I felt that whatever it cost I must obtain rest and shelter somewhere. I therefore made up my mind to stop at the first cottage I saw. The fates proved kindly. In a very few minutes I saw a very small house, or rather hut. I crept up to the door and listened

The Escape

awhile, after a little I heard a child coughing, and then saw a small lamp burning inside. I plucked up courage to knock, having not the slightest idea who would be inside, but anything was better than being found by a patrol of the Red Army so near to the frontier in daylight. I must have knocked too timidly the first time, so I knocked again louder, "Who is there?" a woman's voice asked. I replied, "A stranger who has lost his way." After a few moments the door was opened and I followed the woman through the outer into the inner room, where I found some children and two older boys sleeping. One of these boys, a ferret-faced youth, asked me what I was doing there and added that he could see I was no Russian—or Finn either. I mumbled something in answer, not knowing what to say, when he suddenly jerked out, "I know what you are after; you want to cross the frontier." I saw there was no chance or sense in denying the charge, so I straightway admitted it and added that if he would show me the way I would pay him well. "Oh," he answered, turning to his companion, "we

The Escape

know you will pay well ; you will have to, because it is very dangerous and if we give you up to the guards we shall get 100 roubles each."

Whether this was actually true or not I had no means of knowing ; but I did know that if they wished they could easily get more by arranging with the soldiers to get me shot whilst trying to cross the frontier and then dividing the spoils.

Anyway I did not trouble to dispute it. I simply asked, "How much do you want?" After a little consultation they asked for 300 roubles each. I appealed to the woman, who turned out to be the mother of the other boy, and after a good deal of haggling and wrangling I got them to agree to accept 200 roubles each.

Having settled on the bargain I naturally asked, "When do we start?" They replied at about ten o'clock. Thinking they meant ten p.m. I asked if I might lay down awhile and sleep. The mother made a place for me and I lay down under my overcoat. I did not seem to have been asleep a minute when I was awakened by the ferret-faced boy saying, "We must

The Escape

start soon." I looked at my watch and saw it was 9.30 and daylight. "What!" I asked, "are we going to risk it in the daytime?" They explained that at night it was quite impossible to get through because all the roads were closed and that we would certainly be stopped. In the daytime it was possible to dodge into the forest paths when the soldiers were not looking, that was the only way it could be managed.

I was entirely in their hands and was half suspicious, so while they went outside to see if anyone was about I asked the woman, to whom I had made a present, if she thought I could trust them. She assured me on the point. The present I had given the woman consisted of some highly valued needles and thread together with a few pieces of leather and forty roubles. When the boys returned they demanded that I should pay them at once. This I would not agree to do, but arranged with the help of the mother to put the correct amount into an envelope in their presence which was to be given to them the moment we were on the frontier. They

The Escape

agreed to this plan and after a little meal consisting of some bread, potatoes and a drink of tea, we started off.

They explained to me that though we were only three versts (about two miles) from the frontier we must make a detour of about twenty versts until we arrived at a place where there were only two soldiers guarding a forest through which the frontier ran. I was carefully coached what to say in case we met any soldiers, and they made it very clear that in any eventuality they would disclaim all responsibility for me; they would state that they had just met me accidentally. After walking for about an hour a peasant caught us up in his sleigh. I suggested to the boys that we should ask him to give us a lift. This was done and the peasant agreed. He appeared to be almost entirely ignorant of Russian and, like many people in that part of Russia, was only acquainted with the Finnish language. It was here I made the discovery that the ferret-faced boy was a Finn. In a short time we were bowling along in the sleigh in comparative comfort. I lay down amongst the hay, leaving the

The Escape

boys to explain my presence as best they could.

We passed two groups of soldiers in the course of about ten versts. The peasant and the boys greeted them; I do not think they noticed me at all. At last we drove right into a little farmyard, where we alighted. I gave the driver ten roubles and then we all went into the house.

Here again, although we were still in Russia, only the Finnish language was spoken. There were in this place four or five men, several women and many children, all speaking Finnish. The boys told me to say nothing, but to give the father forty roubles for some dinner and to wait whilst they took it in turns to look out for the moment when the frontier guards' backs were turned. When this happened I was to rush out and enter the forest at once, where I would be comparatively safe. It must be remembered that even at this point we were still five versts from the actual frontier line.

The peasant who had driven me in now drove away and I waited for nearly an

The Escape

hour and a half whilst the boys were taking it in turns to run in and out. At last one of them rushed in and said, "Now is your chance." We all ran out of the cottage and crossed the road and there I saw the two soldiers about forty yards away talking to a woodcutter. They certainly had their backs turned to us, but their rifles were in readiness and the forest was a little too thin to be comfortable. We hurriedly waded through the knee-deep snow for about a quarter of an hour and then the boys started to look for a path whilst I waited.

I spent quite a half an hour in a state of numbed suspense, whilst the boys tried first one direction and then another.

At last they declared they had found the right path and after wading another 400 yards or so we found a little footpath which my compass showed was in the right direction. The boys assured me we had passed the danger zone and suggested that they could now leave me, but I insisted on their accompanying me to the actual frontier which, they had previously explained, was marked by a river. We went on for two hours walking Indian file

The Escape

through the forest until we came to a partly frozen river. I noticed that the boys were very much on the alert and stopped each time before they came to one of the straight avenues which are made through all the Russian forests. On these occasions one of them would go forward and look round before giving the signal to proceed.

On arriving at the river they declared this to be the actual frontier. I thought there would have been some trenches or at least some barbed wire and could scarcely believe them. They insisted that they were right and demanded their money. Feeling tired and perhaps unduly suspicious because of what was at stake, I took out of my pocket a little dictionary which I told them was a Bible and made them swear upon it that they were speaking the truth. This they did. I paid the money and left them carefully counting it. Before leaving me they instructed me to follow the path until I came to a road, and after going along along the road for about one and a half versts, said that I should find a house where I could rest.

It was now about four o'clock in the

The Escape

afternoon and I pushed on, but very soon the path branched off in several directions. All looked equally likely, but I gave the casting vote to my compass.

I wandered up- and down-hill for about five hours and began to fear that the boys had deceived me after all, that I had simply been led into a forest to get lost. I was so tired that I often began to fancy I could see houses and lights, scores of times I stopped, thinking I heard voices. I wanted to meet someone, but was always afraid that it might be a Russian soldier. The only comforting thought was the one that came from feeling that I had still got possession of my revolver.

Suddenly I noticed something by the side of the path ; I picked it up and found that it was an empty cigarette packet. I shouted for joy ; the printing on it was in Finnish. In a few minutes I found another, and this was also Finnish. As there was practically no tobacco in Russia and certainly no packets of cigarettes, I began to feel reasonably sure that I was really in Finland at last.

I wandered up and down for some time

The Escape

longer, picking my way by the help of the torch and compass until I came to something which looked a little more like a road. All at once I saw a light. This time it was a real light showing through a tiny window. It did not disappear when I looked at it carefully, as the others had been doing for the last few hours. When I got near enough I saw that it was a woodcutter's cottage. I knocked; no one answered, so I opened the door and went in. In a glance I saw that it was not Russian, the arrangement of the stove was quite different. I have been in hundreds of Russian houses and have noticed that they all have certain things in common, the stove, the Icon and the boards running from the stove where they all sleep. This cottage was different in many respects. They were burning splinters of wood for light, igniting another as one burnt out.

The inmates of the house proved to be a woodcutter and his wife, neither of whom could speak Russian. They were Finns. I made them understand what I wanted by signs, but they showed me they had no room and at last made me understand that a

The Escape

better house could be found a little further on.

The man very kindly came out and accompanied me, I was so weary that I took his arm with one hand and used my stick as a help with the other. Nothing mattered now, for I was in Finland and felt already that I had reached home. We had only gone about half a mile when two Finnish soldiers met us. They searched me perfunctorily, but did not find the revolver. They looked at my precious and carefully guarded British passport by the light from my electric torch and then we all went on together until we came to a large farmhouse.

Neither of the soldiers could understand anything but Finnish, a language of which I could only speak ten words. None of these were of any use at this juncture. On arrival at the farmhouse we fortunately found a man who could speak both Russian and Finnish, who quickly made the soldiers understand that I was English. On receipt of this news the soldiers were very obliging and arranged for me to stay the night at the farmhouse, whilst they went on to

The Escape

their guard house about four versts away. They promised to call for me in the morning.

The good lady of the house gave me a splendid supper ; it was the first square meal I had had for months. A bed was brought into the immense kitchen and I was soon asleep.

The next morning at seven I was awakened by the man who had acted as interpreter, who asked me to sell him my revolver. I told him that I did not possess one. He laughed outright and said that it would certainly be taken from me by the soldiers later on. There was a good deal of truth in what he said, so after haggling for a time I let him have it for eighty marks, my supper, bed and breakfast.

I had only just finished this business when my two soldier friends came in. They were very kind and sat and smoked whilst I made an excellent breakfast of potatoes, mutton and porridge with milk. There was also some bread and something I had almost forgotten the taste of—butter. The only thing lacking was sugar for the tea. Already I felt considerably stronger

The Escape

and walked with the soldiers to the guard house with a feeling of buoyancy.

Later I was sent with a soldier in a sleigh to the nearest railway station, and after being taken to Terijoki to fulfil the necessary formalities I eventually arrived at Helsingfors, where after my passport had been *viséd* I was enabled to return to England, the country I had feared I should never see again.

CHAPTER III

NORMAL LIFE IN RUSSIAN TOWNS AND VILLAGES

WHEN in February, 1914, I left England and crossed the frontier out of Germany into Russia my heart sank. The contrast between the spick and span German towns and villages and the rude and rough appearance of the Russian countryside made one feel like leaving a house to live in a barn. To myself, a stranger who had never been further away from home than a day trip to Boulogne, it appeared most inhospitable and forbidding, and for many weeks after my arrival in Petrograd I found myself continually sighing for the familiar sights of London. Before the edict which forbade the sale of vodka there was a frightful amount of drunkenness in Russian towns. In my time I have seen plenty of drunkenness in England, especially on Saturday nights in mining and

Normal Life in Russian Towns

manufacturing districts, but never have I seen such horrible degradation as was to be met with at every turn in some parts of Petrograd. Never shall I forget the disgust and astonishment with which, on the first occasion, I observed half a dozen men sit down in a gateway opposite the window of the factory where I worked, and in less than ten minutes become helplessly drunk upon the contents of several bottles of vodka which could be bought at that time at a very trifling cost. Afterwards I became quite used to such sights. In some of the lower parts of the city I was told there were murders almost every night as the direct result of the consumption of this raw, ardent spirit.

Before the Revolution the life of the ordinary workman in Petrograd, although restricted in many important directions, was not without its compensations. He generally worked rather longer hours than we do in England, and there was no Saturday half holiday, except in a few British factories, a thing which I missed at first very much. Work was also carried on in some places on Sunday mornings.

Normal Life in

On the other hand, there were the Church holidays, over fifty in the year, on which no work was done, whilst the workmen received full pay, and double pay if for some cause or other their services were required. It was also the custom, at least in the printing trade, to allow each workman to take a week or a fortnight's leave upon full pay each year and as far as possible the men were allowed to arrange the date to suit their own convenience.

In the summer it was quite the thing for large numbers of the workmen to send their families into the country—many of them going back to their own native villages and helping in the harvesting, etc.

In the towns there were the summer gardens with variety performances and open air cafés. The Narodny Dom (People's Palace) in Petrograd was very popular; I have spent many a pleasant evening there. In 1914 there were theatres, kinemas, circuses, and small variety shows open everywhere. There were tea-houses in every street, generally provided with an automatic organ, usually of Italian make. Some of the latest ones

Russian Towns and Villages

played remarkably well. These places were patronised by workmen who in England would be called the artisan class, and if it had not been for the terrible weakness of many of the workmen for vodka, which unfortunately could be bought so cheaply at that time, I am inclined to think that, except in the matter of political freedom, the Russian workmen were in many respects better off than many of the same class in England. They were not kept so closely at their work in the factories as most of our workmen are, but were able to stop and have a drink of tea almost whenever they liked. I visited many factories on different occasions and found the workmen making themselves very comfortable. Like everyone else, they craved for what was denied to them—free speech. I have often seen small groups of political prisoners being deported to, I suppose, Siberia. Their crime was rarely more than a trumpery political offence, yet in other directions liberty almost amounted to licence. As long as one did not bother with politics it was possible to do many things which are

Normal Life in

more or less forbidden in England. I cannot imagine any place being more "gay" than most of the large towns in Russia.

It was a different picture of life in Petrograd in December, 1918, just before I left. Then shops, tea-houses and restaurants were almost all closed, a sick and starving population were hunting for food, women whose faded clothes showed that they had once been members of a respected and respectable class, hunted amongst rubbish for the head of a herring or any bit of offal that might have escaped the attention of the cats. Everyone except the younger Soviet Commissars and the Red soldiers had a look of hunger and suffering on their faces. I was astounded one day when I met a man whom I knew had built up a business by his own industry, a business where 650 workmen had been formerly employed, painfully dragging himself along the street. He was black with coal dust gathered during his day of forced labour, which took the form of unloading coal from the German ships which came to Petrograd in the late sum-

Russian Towns and Villages

mer of 1918. Everything had been taken from him, yet his only crime was that he had by his own skill and industry founded a small business which gave agreeable and profitable work to many of his fellow countrymen. In a word, he was an employer.

The houses in the towns are generally built upon one plan, there is a courtyard around which is built an edifice of flats several stories high. Our house was one of the largest, it was eight stories high. The entrance to these blocks of flats is through a gate which is closed every night at a certain hour—10 or 11 p.m. generally. In times of unrest, which became rather common later, they were often closed much earlier ; sometimes, indeed, they were kept closed all day, the inmates being let in or out by the porter. These porters, or Dvorniks, as they are called in Russian, deserve a little notice, as they played a very important part under the old *régime* and still continue to fill a scarcely less significant *rôle* under the Bolsheviki.

They were all under the direct control of the police, to whom they were com-

Normal Life in

pelled by law to report all the comings and goings of the tenants and their visitors. Every morning the head porter, or "Starshy Dvornik," had to go to the police station of his district with lists of the people who had slept in the house on the previous night. Each newcomer had to give his passport, without which no one was allowed to go anywhere, to the head porter for registration, for which service a small fee was charged. Even if a visitor wanted to stay the night at a friend's flat, the same ceremony was supposed to be gone through, although in actual practice this was often omitted. Still it must not be forgotten that this involved some considerable risk to the head porter, as he was held accountable for all that happened in the house.

When you get accustomed to these rules and regulations you hardly notice them, but at first it feels like a grave curtailment of one's personal liberty when you come home a little later than usual to have to awaken a more or less—generally rather more than less—sleepy porter in order to gain admittance. Although I understand the same regulations respecting the regis-

Russian Towns and Villages

tration of passports applied to the country, they did not appear to be carried out anything like so rigidly. There were few porters, the country folk living in their own little cottages.

The Russian workman is a great, big, good-natured baby, and like a child has often lightning strokes of penetration; the trouble is that he is seldom possessed of the power to compare and to know his strong points. For the most part he is wayward and sometimes tragically, often comically, inconsequent. He will never work regularly except under pressure of some external force, he will cheerfully give you anything out of his bountiful good nature except regular work. I was a foreman in a sense, and against all advice I honestly tried to get my work done in the factory by imitating the easy-going good nature of the Russian. I made things easy, gave every privilege it was in my power to give, but was at last compelled to act as though I had the power to dismiss men who would not do their work.

I daresay that this characteristic of the average Russian workmen has helped to

Normal Life in

make the task of the Bolsheviks more difficult. I cannot think of any of the factories in which I have worked in England where the whole concern would stop if the hand of authority was taken away. There are always a large number of men who have a sense of restrained self-discipline and who would go on with their work, master or no master. Under no circumstances can I conceive of Bolshevism in the Russian sense lasting in England for a day. We either work or strike, the Russian tries to do both at the same time, and does it without knowing he is in fact on three-quarter strike.

I did not become really well acquainted with village life until the early spring of 1918, when I went beyond Vologda to stay with some friends whose acquaintance I had made in Petrograd. At that time, of course, the Bolsheviks were already in power, and had made great changes in the towns.

Here in the villages a thousand versts from Petrograd and Moscow the changes were not very visible, and indeed when I came to speak to the people I found that

Russian Towns and Villages

the majority seemed to have only the vaguest notion of what had happened.

With sheep-like docility the more ignorant had taken down the portraits of the Little Father and were asking for "pictures" of the Republic to put in its place. It was plain they had no very clear idea of what a republic (Respublic it is called in Russian) really meant and in some vague way fancied it must be a person.

It was, however, far from being the invariable custom to take down the Tsar's portraits; I saw lots of them in cottages even right down to November of last year. In one sense it would not be quite fair to describe the Russian people as an ignorant people, they know many things and do many things well, such as making boots, building houses, carpentering, etc., which we either never knew or have more or less forgotten, but their lack of "school" education is very great. I have been myself in villages where only the priests and one or two officials could read or write and even then not particularly well. I have even been asked by soldiers and others to read them the numbers on houses, as

Normal Life in

they could not read even figures or tell the time by a clock.

From my window in Petrograd I could look down upon a square where soldiers—recruits—were often drilled, and more than once I have seen the difficulty the sergeant in command has had to teach some of the new recruits from the villages which was the right and which the left leg.

Lots of the older people in the villages could never be brought to understand the difference between an Englishman and a German. Tartars, Turks, Chinese and Japanese they knew were different, but English, French, Italians and even Americans all came from the West and therefore they must all be the same. This, if you please, was after Russia had been at war with Germany as our Allies for three years.

In the country village where I lived I happened casually to mention one day something with reference to the movement of the earth round the sun. "What! you say the earth moves round the sun, that cannot possibly be. Why we see the

Russian Towns and Villages

sun moving round the earth every day with our own eyes."

Later I discovered a description of the solar system in an old Russian almanac and read it aloud to about twenty of the villagers. It was no good, however, they smilingly said "Seeing is believing no matter what is printed in an almanac which we cannot read and would not believe even if we could read." I not only could not convince them but frequently later on when I spoke of something they could not understand, they would say, "Oh, that's like your tale of the earth going round the sun." One might illustrate this ignorance by numerous instances. I particularly remember something I heard a peasant say in the train on a journey from Vologda to Petrograd. I did not hear what had gone before, but I distinctly heard him say: "Oh, yes, I know, Jesus Christ lived a long while ago, and He was not well educated like Lenin and Trotsky." This was obviously said in perfect faith, and not, as I had thought at first, in a vein of satire.

The women appear to do most of the

Normal Life in

farming. I thought at first that this might be the effect of the war in taking away so many able-bodied men, but was assured that this was not the case. The men as a rule followed some trade which was generally the same all over one district. For instance, in one village where I stayed they were all shoemakers, as were most of the men in the surrounding neighbourhood. Further on they would be mostly carpenters, whilst in another district a race of house painters would be found. In all these things they are very conservative, the particular trade of the father being handed down to the son.

In the summer the villages are nearly denuded of men, they go to the towns to follow their vocation and generally return in the autumn to rest during the winter on the stove. In the summer of 1918 there were more men in the villages than had ever been known ; this was due to the unsettled state of affairs in the towns and the starvation which had already commenced.

In consequence of these annual migrations the men were generally far better

Russian Towns and Villages

informed than the women; the majority of the women in the district where I lived—about one hundred versts from the nearest line of railway—had never seen a locomotive or a steamer, much less a motor car or a kinematograph. As a rule my bicycle caused quite a sensation, people cried out with astonishment, sometimes in fear. One man waved his arms as though demented when I rode through a somewhat out of the way village, and I was always attended through the villages by a crowd of interested youngsters.

Only the younger element seem to understand what is happening in the towns; they have either fled from the towns or have come back from the front. In most respects life in the villages went on pretty much in the old way, the holidays were celebrated with processions and afterwards there were dancing and singing in the open part of the village. To one who had just come from the terror of Petrograd they seemed to be living a very comfortable life.

In the summer they started to divide the land in the district where I was living.

Normal Life in

Each village went about it in its own way, the local soviets were gradually formed, but they varied considerably in character. In those cases where there had been a large influx of returned soldiers Bolshevism took a firm hold, private trading was abolished and only the local co-operative society—if there was one—was allowed to continue trading. In these places there was a considerable amount of shooting and disorder, but in others the soviets were elected from among the people of the village and they arranged things to suit the majority, who were as a rule far from being Bolsheviks or of understanding even the rudiments of Bolshevik principles. The villages became a law unto themselves and each was in effect a little Republic, or dictatorship, as the case might be. It was forbidden to take foodstuffs from one village into another under any circumstances. In November last I found some villages were on the verge of starvation whilst others near by, which happened to have more land to divide, were loaded up with stocks of grain, carefully hidden away as far as possible.

Russian Towns and Villages

The houses in the country in Russia seem all to be built upon the same plan. I saw very little variation although I visited scores, if not hundreds in various parts of Northern Russia. These consist generally of one living room, the kitchen, with the brick stove on the top of which they lie in winter and if they were somewhat better off then there would be an extra room called the "piaty stenka," *i.e.* fifth wall, where the father could receive and entertain his friends and visitors.

Women's rights had not then penetrated into the villages, and it was very unusual to find a house where the man was not lord and master. I must add, however, that in the village councils I noticed that the widows who worked their own farms had a voice in the proceedings.

I found everyone good natured, and was literally overwhelmed with invitations to take tea on any and every occasion. Nothing seemed to offend them more than to attempt to refuse these offers of hospitality. This was not, of course, because I was English; they often said point blank that it was all the same to

Normal Life in

them whether I was English or German or Austrian. They were always very curious to know what kind of religion we professed in England, and because I did not cross myself before their Icons and said that they were almost unknown in our country it was practically impossible to convince them that we had the same Bible and the same root beliefs.

The various new decrees of the Soviets affecting the Church were quite ignored by the older people and they were very ironical and sarcastic about the Bolshevik marriage, which they held to be no marriage at all. So far as I was able to judge the Russians in the villages are very strict as regards morals and only in the towns is any slackness noticeable.

Even when there was real famine in Petrograd the normal life in these villages went on pretty much the same. Food was plentiful, and though they would tell strangers that they had none to spare, to privileged visitors like I became they freely admitted that they had stores enough to last them for at least two years. I ought perhaps to explain how I became a privi-

Russian Towns and Villages

leged visitor ; first of all because I opened a repairing shop in a district where there was none nearer than twenty miles away, the nearest town, and also because I had a camera and took their photographs, printing them post cards at a nominal price.

Through these means I became well known and welcomed for twenty versts round. The inhabitants used to bring me all sorts of things to repair, from buckets to gramophones, and from watches to ploughs ; they generally paid me in kind, so many eggs, so much milk or butter, and so on, which suited me very well and allowed the money I received by repairing machines in the towns to last longer.

The peasants in the country work as a rule very hard in summer, up to eighteen hours in the twenty-four, but on holidays all work, except entertaining guests, is taboo. As a general thing, in the districts I visited they keep their houses very clean, and the afternoon before a holiday, or holy day rather, is given up to cleaning everything in the home and performing their ablutions.

Normal Life in

Once a week I was allowed to use a neighbour's bath. The baths are built separate from the house, and his was beautifully arranged with a small outer room in which to undress, and the inner room for the stewing process, furnished with a special brick stove or oven. These baths are quite like little cottages and on several occasions when I have been travelling by road and did not wish to knock anyone up, I have slept very comfortably in one of them, few of them ever being fastened up.

The great institution is the samovar. I was of opinion that everyone now knew what these were ; but as I have been asked quite a number of times to describe them, I hope the reader will forgive me if I append a short description.

The samovar is a large urn of metal, generally brass ; in the centre is a chimney and around it the receptacle for water. It is provided with a tap underneath and two handles for lifting and carrying, and the top can be removed to pour in water. Charcoal is placed in the chimney, some red-hot coals or burning wood dropped

Russian Towns and Villages

in on it, and another loose chimney placed over it to ensure a draught. The loose chimney is generally led into a flue arranged for the purpose in the stove. When the water boils the loose chimney is taken off, a lid is placed over the inner chimney and the whole affair is placed upon the table. China tea is now put into a small teapot, boiling water is poured on to it, and then it is generally placed upon the top of the inner chimney after the lid has been removed ; a small quantity of tea is poured into each glass, which is filled up to the top with boiling water from the samovar.

In the country, at least, a lump of sugar is generally held between the front teeth and the tea drunk through the sugar from the saucer. As a rule, all eat from the same dish, each has his or her own spoon, generally a wooden one, and I noticed that a certain order and ceremony is always observed.

I became quite a devotee of the samovar, around which all that is most endearing in the Russian character seems to gather, so that to me it seems to be the symbol of hospitality and good nature.

Normal Life in

By November the villages were beginning to feel the effects of the Bolshevik decrees ; horses were requisitioned, cattle were taken, food was commandeered. They had divided the land, but being short of agricultural implements they were unable to make the best use of it ; without many of the best horses it would be difficult to work. Heavy taxes were being laid upon all who had land, and flour was demanded before any of the few necessities which still remained in the Communal Soviet shop could be bought.

In November, many people had only half a pint or so of kerosine to last them until the New Year, when they were promised new coupons with which to procure a further pint.

A short description of the stove which I found universal in Russian cottages and which plays so important a part in their domestic economy may be interesting. It is built of brick upon a foundation of wood, bricks and clay and consists of an oven with an arched brick roof very similar to our baker's oven. The fire, however, is lighted in the oven itself,

Russian Towns and Villages

which is provided with a flue leading to the chimney which can be closed later when the fire has been drawn.

As a rule, a fire is lighted each morning and while it is burning all the food which is needed for the day is cooked. Afterwards, when the fire has been drawn, the oven is closed and the heat is thus retained for a long time. Food put in in the morning can be taken out nice and hot in the evening or even, if it is a well-built oven and has had a good fire, the next morning. On the top it is always cosy and warm, even in the most bitter weather, and it is the general custom to sleep there during the winter upon sheepskins and rugs.

CHAPTER IV

THE MARCH REVOLUTION

LONG before the Revolution was accomplished there were rumours of its possibility, indeed I have often been told that a Revolution was on the point of happening when the War was first started. I cannot vouch for this from personal knowledge; for one thing, it took me more than two years to learn to speak the language and the political life of a country is not, as a rule, the thing one learns first.

What I do know is that when War was declared there were a few days of frightful suspense; everyone seemed to be hanging on the news as to whether England was going to join or not. Night and day I was asked anxious questions; in a sense I suddenly became an important person to all the workpeople in my own and neighbouring factories. I was really as much

The March Revolution

in the dark as anyone else and just as anxious to know.

When the news did come through there were scenes of indescribable enthusiasm, and really in those days it was a great thing to be an Englishman. I will not waste time by trying to picture some of the incidents ; there were hundreds of them, all having the effect of making one feel proud.

Until the fall of Warsaw the workmen whom I knew seemed quite confident of the result. The general conditions were good ; food was both plentiful and comparatively cheap ; there was little if any change in prices. I have the best of means of judging this, for my salary was not an extravagant one and I had to send one-half of it home to my wife ; with the remainder I kept myself and made a practice of living on one rouble per day. This was sufficient to enable me to get all the food and necessities I required, and I never noticed any change in the cost.

Whatever may be said of the Tsarist *régime* there was certainly very little profiteering in food. Bread cards had

The March Revolution

been issued just before the Revolution ; but they meant little, for one could always buy as much as was needed at a very low price.

On the other hand, there was undoubtedly a good deal of speculation and swindling in the matter of Government contracts, about which a good deal was said.

The chief feature, however, was the rapidly maturing belief that the people were being sold, and confidence in many of the army chiefs was at a low ebb. In all the talk I never heard anything which could be called evidence ; it was all rumour based on hearsay. The fall of Warsaw appeared inexplicable to Russians apart from treachery, and the wildest stories were believed. Rasputin was talked about a good deal at the time ; but not in connection with treachery to Russia, his crimes were of a different character.

There had been a number of small strikes during the autumn and winter of 1916 and 1917, culminating in several strikes in February, 1917.

The March Revolution

I do not think that I am ever likely to forget the Sunday which preceded the Revolution, it was Sunday, February 26, 1917 (old style).

Strikes were pretty general in the previous week, and the hoardings were full of proclamations calling upon the strikers to return to work. Little if any notice was taken of them, and it was known that the soldiers were in sympathy with the workmen. What organisation existed could only be of a hand-to-mouth character, the Revolution was in the air you breathed, rather than in organised bodies. Belief in the sympathy of the soldiers was a source of great confidence and encouragement to the strikers.

There were many reasons for this sympathy. The soldiers' wages were very low, never amounting to more than a few kopecks, separation allowances were unknown, and although in some cases the wife succeeded in obtaining her husband's situation—for instance, the wife of our house porter became the porter, and in the country the women would work on the land—there must have been an

The March Revolution

immense amount of distress. I know of many such cases, and we helped where we could.

There was, in addition, the enormous gulf which separated the officer class from that of the men. It was an unbridgeable gulf—for all practical purposes, the two classes might have been living in different worlds. Discipline was terribly severe and the punishments make one shudder to think of them.

After the fall of Warsaw very few officers were trusted by the men and this fact was known to the strikers, who conversed about it freely in the factories.

For a long time before this whispers went round that the police had placed machine-guns in the garrets of corner houses and in all buildings which commanded a square or street. Very little definite news was known, because it was quite easy for the police in Petrograd to instal any weapons they chose in any position in the houses without the inmates being any the wiser. It must be remembered that each house in Russia is built round a courtyard and contains many

The March Revolution

flats, sometimes hundreds, and that these houses were managed by the porters, who were entirely in the power, and to some extent even in the pay, of the police.

On this particular Sunday I went out about midday for a walk and could not help noticing that an important addition had been made to the placards and proclamations which ordered the strikers to return to work. I stopped to read it, and although I cannot remember all it contained, the sting was in the tail, which said that unless the workpeople returned to work by Monday (or it may have been Tuesday—I cannot remember distinctly) morning without fail they would all be mobilised for active service. No account was to be taken of the kind of work they did, there were to be no “indispensables” and all would be immediately SENT TO THE FRONT.

This proclamation was signed by the Chief of Police—Obolensky.

This was, as it was intended to be, an ultimatum, and the sequel proved that it was no idle threat. I walked along the Nevsky Prospekt and found that it was extraordinarily crowded with people and,

The March Revolution

what was even more remarkable, although we did not realise the significance of it at the time, was the entire absence of the usual gorodevoy—the Russian policeman. In their places were groups of soldiers fully armed with rifles, bayonets and other military equipment.

Rumours were flying thick and fast, people constantly turned to the soldiers and, talking loud enough for them to hear, said, "Surely they will never fire on their brothers," and made other remarks of a similar kind.

Usually under such circumstances the Russian soldier would have smiled and made some kind of good-natured answer; these men, however, remained stolid, glum and quite immovable. It was not until later we discovered that they were not soldiers, but police dressed and armed as soldiers. I strolled into a café and sat for perhaps half an hour or so, and then walked out. The Prospekt was more crowded than ever; it was quite an orderly crowd, there was wonder rather than excitement.

Suddenly, just as I was about to cross

The March Revolution

the road, an officer drew his sword, waved it in the air and shouted out several times, "Go away, go away."

Now as the Prospekt is two miles long, only the tiniest fraction of the crowd could possibly have heard him; it was mere chance that I was near enough to do so. Almost immediately after shouting, "Go away," he gave another order, the actual words of which I did not catch, but I saw a row of "soldiers" throw themselves down across the road and straightway begin to fire volleys into the crowd. I was astounded and too paralysed with astonishment to move. At first I thought the rifles could not really be loaded, and that perhaps they were only firing blank cartridges to disperse the crowd.

It was not long before I realised that the shots were fired to kill, and did kill. The great wide road began to empty like magic, people ran for their lives. They tried to run down gateways, but these had all been closed by order of the police, they then rushed down the side streets. I saw numbers fall. One boy not far from me, wounded and bleeding, tried to crawl

The March Revolution

away from the centre of the road, others lay where they had fallen. In other directions, the "soldiers" were firing down the Nevsky. By great good luck I happened to be standing just between two groups of "soldiers," and so was able to escape, as their fire was outwards.

After recovering from the first paralyzing shock, my blood tingled with rage and shame, and I thought to myself that if the Russian people stood this without resisting they would never deserve to be a free people. In the sequel they did resist, and resist to some tune, in a short two days they had completely destroyed the old bureaucratic despotism.

I went home wondering what would happen after such a terrible scene. The next morning, Monday, however, I was able to go about my business, though I saw at two points a group of soldiers with horses and machine-guns. Afterwards I went down the Nevsky to see what damage the shooting of Sunday had done to the buildings and reflected when I had examined the holes, made in some cases through iron shutters, what a near escape I had had.

The March Revolution

Everyone was then saying that the long-expected Revolution was imminent. It was a day of great tension. I went home rather early, and except for some distant firing was not aware that anything specially unusual was happening. Very early next morning, however, I was awakened by wild shouts of joy from the populace, mingled with near and distant shooting. Above everything could be heard the cry, "We have taken the fortress of Peter and Paul," everybody shouting it out. Excitement was continually at fever heat as the name of one regiment after another was given who had come out openly on the people's side. When it was definitely known that the Cossacks had come over, the enthusiasm reached its climax. In England this might not seem a very great thing; but Russia, though it feared its Cossacks, was at heart proud of them too.

I remember seeing one day in the streets of Petrograd an officer quarrelling with a cabman. A Cossack soldier happened to be passing and the officer ordered him to give the cabman a cut with his whip.

The March Revolution

This the soldier did and took a piece clean out of the cabman's thick coat and jacket. Instead of being furious, as I expected, the cabman turned to the bystanders and said in a voice full of admiration, "That was neatly done, smart boys our Cossacks, eh?" Many of the streets were quite impassable owing to the great crowds of soldiers and workmen, all armed, who were going about looking for the hiding-places of the police and well-known supporters of the old *régime*. Every few minutes the crowds opened out to let through motor cars and lorries filled with soldiers, workmen, and even boys, all armed to the teeth and waving red flags, who were rushing off to take part in the "siege" of one or the other police stations which had not yet capitulated.

The hunt for the police was carried on with particular zest. No one was allowed to escape, they were generally shot or bayoneted on the spot. To get out of the range of a machine-gun I ran into a doorway and along a passage, almost into the arms of two policemen who were crouching with Brownings in their hands.

The March Revolution

I quickly dodged back, whilst the small crowd which followed me in rushed forward, and discovering the policemen, shot them, afterwards flinging their bodies out into the street.

Near where I lived I saw that a police station was being besieged ; very soon it was on fire and although the fire engines were only next door the crowd would not permit anyone to make an attempt to put out the flames. " Smoke the dogs out of their kennels," they cried, and any unfortunate policeman who tried to escape was at once shot down by the revolvers and rifles of the crowd which surrounded the building upon every side. The wives and families of the police were allowed to come out, bringing with them a few of their treasures, but no men were allowed to escape their vengeance. Afterwards great bonfires were made of all the dossiers, some of which were burning for days, soldiers standing guard over them so that no one should be able to rescue even one leaf from the flames.

Near the Touchkoff bridge a policeman was caught by the crowd on the Wednes-

The March Revolution

day morning as he was taking his two little girls out for a walk. He was dressed in civilian clothes. It was a pitiful sight to see the two poor little children taken away crying whilst their father was being led away to be shot. This so worked upon my feelings that I became bold enough to suggest to one or two who were holding him that perhaps he was not so bad as some and might be allowed to go. Two or three took up the suggestion, moved, no doubt, by the children's tears, and after they had given the ex-policeman a number of blows over the head he was allowed to depart.

On another occasion I saw a lad standing and chuckling over the body of a policeman which was lying in the road. As I passed the lad turned to me and said, "He chivvied me out of the market the other day ; he won't do it any more."

All the prisons were captured ; I saw several burned down. The prisoners were first brought out, pale and trembling, and nearly all looking very ill. As they came out, they were asked by the crowd, "What were you in for ?" If it was a

The March Revolution

political offence they were cheered ; many shook their hands and it was difficult to suppress tears on seeing some of the touching incidents. The kindness was overwhelming. If the prisoner admitted having been imprisoned for some criminal offence, particulars were asked, and in many cases they were thrashed and told they would forfeit their lives if they were caught again. All were allowed to go. One poor fellow had been in prison twenty-seven years ; when he found himself free he did not know what to do. He sat down on the snow and cried. Except for the killing of the policemen the whole atmosphere seemed to be one of an old world made young.

Certainly we were all a little nervous, wondering many things and particularly if we should have to go without food, since all the shops remained closed for the first day or two. No newspapers were published, with the result that the wildest rumours were flying about. The most extraordinary stories were circulated. We did not know at first what to believe. On the second day motors appeared from

The March Revolution

which single news leaves were thrown. There was a mad scramble to get possession of one of these leaflets, and whoever was successful was immediately the centre of an eager crowd, to whom he was expected to read the whole of it. Everyone was anxious to know what had happened, and what was going to be done. Those first days of the Revolution were glorious ones after all. King Hope reigned unchallenged. Everywhere were songs and greetings ; new newspapers appeared with what seemed to our eyes outrageously daring headlines. New unions were formed, new enterprises of all kinds proposed, and only those who were a little longer-headed than the others believed other than that ail Russia's troubles were now at an end. Alas ! poor Russia. Writing at this date I well remember the discussion between a professor and some of his pupils. I happened to be working at the school erecting a large camera for the authorities ; the students were maintaining almost violently to the professor that everything must go on swimmingly now. This professor had spent several

The March Revolution

years in prison as a political offender and was shaking his head sadly from time to time, and declared that a sea of Russian blood would be shed before his beloved country would make any real progress on the path to Freedom.

At the time I was inclined to side with the students, and told the professor that his view was a little pessimistic. He evidently knew more of Russia and of the world than I did. Quite recently I learned that this same professor had been shot by the Bolsheviks as a counter-revolutionary ; it seems a strange end for a man who had fought all his life for freedom, but then there are so many of this kind of man who have been similarly treated.

For a time there was little done except to talk politics. I expect there was more political discussion in the first few weeks after the Revolution than in the fifty years which preceded it. It was perhaps because the freedom was new and very intoxicating, the talk was ceaseless. A curious sight were the endless processions of various political bodies. Anarchists with black flags and a few Bolsheviks held meetings.

The March Revolution

All were applauded out of sheer good nature. Few, if any, took any real notice of what was said ; they just laughed at the whole thing as a good joke which freedom could afford.

There was one unpleasant feature. The constant succession of lynchings seemed at first a little perplexing, knowing as I do the essential good nature of the Russian. The kind of person who was lynched was in the main those thought to be guilty of social wrongs, especially of theft. There were two reasons for this, the first was the sudden abolition of the death penalty, which caused people to think that there was no redress for wrongs done. In a country accustomed to regular justice with a known standard by which crimes are measured it would be possible to abolish the death penalty ; but in Russia where few expected justice and where the police had such wide powers, the abolition of the death penalty seemed to mean an end of all the checks on social crimes. The other reason was the belief that no one had a right to commit crimes now that the Revolution was a fact. Under the

The March Revolution

Tsar much might be forgiven, but nothing could be forgiven a man who spoiled the fair name of the Revolution.

This perhaps would not have worked out so badly if the people had been accustomed to personal restraint and had some judicial experience. They were without either, and knew they personally could not be controlled.

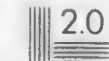
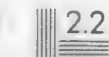
Among the incidents which came under my personal observation was that of a lady in a crowded tramcar in Petrograd who cried out suddenly that she had had her purse stolen. She said that it contained fifty roubles and accused a well-dressed young man who happened to be standing behind her of the theft. The latter most earnestly protested his innocence and declared that rather than be called a thief he would give the woman fifty roubles out of his own pocket. Nothing availed him; perhaps they thought he protested too much. He was taken outside and promptly shot.

The body of the poor fellow was searched, but no purse was found. The upholders of the integrity of the Russian



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

The March Revolution

Republic returned to the tramcar and told the woman that she had better make a more careful search. She did so and discovered that the missing purse had slipped down through a hole in the pocket into the lining. Nothing could be done for the unfortunate victim of "justice," so they took the only course which seemed to them to meet the case and leading the woman out, shot her also. On another occasion I was present when three men were accused of burgling and thrown into the half-frozen Fontanka canal. From the house where the burglary had taken place an elderly man rushed forth hatless and without his coat, crying that a mistake had been made. The real burglars had got clean away and three entirely innocent men had been lynched. In a moment the crowd had turned on the newcomer, and crying, "No doubt he is an accomplice," seized him and threw him in after the others. When the crowd had partly dispersed several of us tried to get the poor unfortunates out. We managed to get two of the bodies out, one was that of the old gentleman. Later it was clearly

The March Revolution

proved that he was the owner of the house and had spoken quite correctly. I had two very near squeaks myself through being close to people who were accused of theft, and only escaped once after having been rather severely beaten.

Another incident will illustrate this lack of restraint by some Russians. A friend with whom I had been talking suddenly lost his temper, and before I knew where I was had pushed my head through a pane of glass. The next minute he was full of remorse and fell to picking the pieces of glass out of my head whilst crying all the time and trying to kiss me. His sorrow was genuine, and I know he would never hurt me again under any circumstances. Still I would have preferred his friendship without the unnecessary pieces of glass in my head.

To the Russian the blackest crime in the calendar is ingratitude. Many crimes he can forgive, but what he conceives to be ingratitude is beyond the pale. I think the lynchings which were so frequent under the Provisional Government could be explained upon these grounds. After the

The March Revolution

Revolution the idea of a common brotherhood, always the chief feeling of the Russian just as liberty is that of the Englishman and equality of the Frenchman, became so much more real that they felt that anyone—no matter who—guilty of breaking the laws of Brotherhood was not fit to live, and I am inclined to think that it was this idea, carried—like most things in Russia—to excess, that accounts for the epidemic of lynching which broke out then, and not so much from any laxity of the law. It seemed to them such monstrous ingratitude to rob their brothers, that only a speedy death could absolve it.

On the other hand, the Russian is won over by kindness more quickly than any other people I have met. Their aim, when you have broken through the slight crust of suspicion with which they regard strangers, seems to be to try to outdo you in generosity and hospitality.

Once they are convinced that you mean well by them, no more open-hearted and generous friends could be imagined. But if they should get it into their heads that

The March Revolution

they have been deceived, they are quick to resent it and to try to revenge themselves upon those who they think have abused their hospitality.

It was in consequence of the many disorders and the fact that the police had ceased to exist that house committees were first set up, part of the business of which it was to arrange for the protection of the house at night. Each resident was supposed to take his or her turn in doing this. In practice we found it best to employ men specially for this work, a kind of house militia. Generally we could get a returned soldier to undertake the work, work which did not become a very dangerous calling until the later troublous times, although there was occasionally some unpleasant incidents. At that time there was a strong force of public opinion holding in check the irresponsible elements, and it was not until the Bolsheviks had seized the power that the hooligans were able to act with almost complete impunity.

The two most important things which were being done about this time which ought to be noticed was the formation of

The March Revolution

trade unions of all kinds and the election for the Town Council. Although not sure of the basis of the franchise, I know that all adult men and women were given a vote for the Town Council—I also had one and used it. No more democratic election could be wished for anywhere. In the main the men who were elected were those who had played some part in the Revolution itself. Very few Bolsheviks were successful, I do not think they could have had more than a very few candidates even, and certainly they had little to do with the making of the Revolution.

Bolshevism must never be confused with the original Soldiers' and Workmen's Councils. In a later chapter I hope to explain how they captured some of these Soviets or Councils. The Town Council was elected and quickly got to work as far as opportunity permitted ; the story of its violent suppression also appears in the next chapter.

On the formation of the trade unions a great deal might have been said if ever they had been allowed to grow naturally. Very shortly after the Revolution branches

The March Revolution

of them were formed by every class in society. Before the Revolution they were under the old laws—even where they were allowed at all—and for all practical purposes might never have been allowed to exist. They were hedged about with all kinds of restrictions and were under the complete control of the police.

According to the Law, one had to ask for permission if more than ten people were to meet at one's own house. It did not matter what was the purpose of the gathering, it might be a meeting of friends, a birthday party, a wedding, anything you like, but permission of the police had first to be obtained. Several times I got into trouble for speaking to the men about our English trade unions and the comparative freedom they enjoyed ; but it was by no means easy to hold my tongue about a matter which interested me so much.

After the Revolution the situation completely changed. Masters, trades and workmen formed unions, re-formed them, opened new unions and swallowed up old ones. Everyone who could do so joined

The March Revolution

a union. The dealers even had one. Some of the rules were a curious mixture ; it was evident the rule books of English, German and other Continental unions had been requisitioned and with true catholicity the Russian unions had incorporated some of each into their own.

Not the slightest regard was paid to the suitability of local, particularly Russian local, conditions ; no one seemed to realise that many of our English trade union rules are the result of a steady growth and are based on the need of the particular industry concerned.

The chief object was the raising of wages, I do not think over-much attention was paid to the actual rules. Most unions assumed the most extraordinary powers, claiming the absolute right to fix wages irrespective of the claims of workmen in other industries. Each union became a law unto itself for both the fixing of wages and the right of dismissal. Masters' unions were formed to combat the men's unions, but they soon lost the day, simply because there was no one to state the general point of view.

The March Revolution

What did happen was that the master was able to show that if he paid the increased wages demanded, fewer workmen would be required. This was agreed to by the men's unions, and they accepted the responsibility of dismissing those who were not wanted. The method adopted was by ballot, which meant that the least popular were dismissed. This worked out very badly for the employees who were unpopular or who had no large circle of friends. Wages were sent up in a staggering fashion. In one case the wages of a whole trade were increased 300 per cent. It must be admitted that the money wages, judged by our standard, were very low, but it must be borne in mind that food, although coarse, was both plentiful and very cheap. It was easy for a man to live on a few kopecks a day.

I saw very little evidence of real want among what we should call our workmen class. In a large town there are always fringes of poverty, where somehow the unfortunates and the mistakes of life seem to get, but even of these there was little in Petrograd. I often used to warn

The March Revolution

my friends of the possible effect of so sudden and enormous an increase in wages unless it was obtained out of the product of the industry. Had the increase only happened in a few industries, some way of escape might have been found, but all wanted it and all got it. No notice was taken of any warnings, many of the workers' best friends risked their popularity by warning them, but they only smiled and went on dismissing their own comrades. For a time all went merrily. Girls used to come to work in the factory in silk blouses and high boots, boots which cost at that time the unheard-of price of £12 (120 roubles). The tragedy was that amongst those who had been discharged by the votes of their fellow workmates some were compelled to go short of the barest necessities. I remember being in the office of a factory one morning when one of the young women who had been dismissed by the ballot of workers came to borrow twenty roubles. I was told that she was one of the best of the workers, and had taught many of the younger girls their business, one of the very last the

The March Revolution

manager would have dreamt of losing if he could have had a voice in the matter. This young workwoman told me that she had an invalid husband at home and three young children, and even as we were talking there came into the office one of the other girls in a beautiful new silk blouse and a dazzling pair of high yellow boots that could not have cost at that time anything less than 140 roubles. The contrast was very painful, and my advice to the poor woman was to go to the offices of the union and tell them the whole story.

For a people unaccustomed to making their own laws, such a result might be expected for a time ; at least until trusted and competent leaders came forward. The sequel shows that those who promised more privileges were the ones who have temporarily succeeded in getting the whip hand.

After a few months of artificial prosperity the bubble burst, prices soared up to the wages, then wages were raised again, and yet again prices overtook them. Protests were made by the wiser men, but

The March Revolution

were unheeded, mainly because another group promised anything and everything. What eventually happened to these trade unions will be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE BOLSHEVIK COUP

DURING the summer of 1917 strong disintegrating forces were at work making it more and more difficult for the Provisional Government to "carry on." True to its principles it gave the widest liberty to every kind of public expression, not the slightest attempt, so far as I remember, being made to suppress anything or anybody.

It is to the everlasting credit of the Provisional Government that it set a standard of free expression which may yet prove the undoing of the present despotism.

There was, however, one disadvantage, a disadvantage which arose not from the idea of liberty but from the fact that the Russian people wanted honest guidance from all leaders whether actual or potential. This certainly was not forth-

The Bolshevik Coup

coming from the Bolsheviks, their business was to use every opportunity to undermine the authority of the Government and to play on the passions of credulity, envy, jealousy and hate. This was an intelligible policy under the Tsarist *régime*, but it did not strike me as quite the game under the new conditions. Certain very important factors played into the hands of the Bolsheviks, the chief of which was the desire for peace, particularly by the soldiers.

To use Kerensky's phrase, "Russia was worn out." This was true, and the difficulty was to find a way by which she could get a chance to rest and recuperate. In a country suffering as Russia was, there was no need to waste time explaining theories of Communism. Lenin's method was much more simple. He said in effect, "Do you want the land?—Then take it. Factories?—They are yours. Money?—The banks belong to the people. Peace?—Certainly, peace at once."

In spite of the plausibility of the cries, there were apparently few Bolsheviks among the people apart from soldiers. There certainly was great dissatisfaction

The Bolshevik Coup

at the delay in calling together the freshly elected Constituent Assembly, which dissatisfaction was added to by the Bolsheviks themselves, who also said they wanted the Constituent Assembly.

Prices were mounting, a contributory cause of which was the sudden raising of wages by the Unions. Miracles were wanted, and being wanted they were hoped for; the Bolsheviks now used the opportunity to promise a performance of the required miracle.

May I again repeat that in Russia the mass of the population were always either without education at all, or with only the merest smattering; even when compared with our own none too high standard? Anyone who could speak well could win them over to their side for the time. Under the Provisional Government, when there was complete liberty of speech, I have heard a speaker upon one side cheered vociferously at the conclusion, and the next speaker who supported a totally opposite party also loudly applauded, and I have seen the very same people cheering for two opposite parties within a few

The Bolshevik Coup

minutes. When the Bolshevik party began to spread their propaganda a few days after the first revolution the majority of the people paid very little attention to them. Their converts were confined to the most ignorant part of the people, the rest had set their hope upon the Constituent Assembly. I know as regards the workmen in Petrograd and Moscow that among those who first formed the various trade unions there were to be found very few real Bolsheviks. Mixing as I did with them every day, at a time when everyone felt not only free to speak his or her mind but also thought that they ought to speak out to make up for the long years of suppression, I had the best possible opportunity of learning what they desired. As the summer advanced and matters, instead of improving as they hoped, were getting in some respects worse, there was evident a subtle change in the tone of the people's demands.

The reiterated propaganda of the Bolsheviks, who were carefully working among the war-weary soldiers, began to bear fruit. The fiasco of July when the first

The Bolshevik Coup

attempt was made by the Bolshevik supporters from Cronstadt to capture Petrograd did indeed but serve to make the Soviets more determined to succeed the next time.

Some of the incidents which occurred in this unsuccessful attempt to capture Petrograd may be of interest. The Bolsheviks came from Cronstadt, when they were always more or less in power, in steamers and barges. It was a beautiful summer's day and most people seemed to take their appearance quite as a matter of course ; I never saw anyone who took it very seriously. I went about my business as usual, my work that day being to visit certain factories to make small repairs and adjustments to machines. The first thing I noticed was a number of small parties composed of very young men, often mere boys. Some were in military or naval uniform, but in the main they were dressed in ordinary civilian clothes wearing caps and walking or riding about armed with revolvers, swords and sometimes rifles.

I was about to cycle away from a factory

The Bolshevik Coup

when a party of them made a determined attempt to annex my bicycle. When I told them I was British, they hesitated for a few moments and then catching sight of a taxi on the opposite side of the road they suddenly left me for the more valuable plunder and took that. At the time my feelings were mostly of amusement mixed with pity, because I thought they would soon be routed and would have to suffer—perhaps badly.

Later in the day I rode down the Nevsky and found they had taken complete possession of it. Carriages and motors other than their own were not allowed to pass, but I was not molested in any way, and had leisure to notice the crowd of boys, as they seemed to me, who were sitting all along the pavements, whilst others were making soup over camp fires in the middle of the road. It was a very strange sight.

The next day they were gradually cleared out. I have never been able to make out how it was they got in so easily. The general impression was that a ridiculous exhibition ~~had~~ been made and no more

The Bolshevik Coup

would be heard of it. Opinion was divided among the workmen; some said they would come again later on and be more successful and that they only failed because they were too precipitate, others treated the exhibition with contempt and were sure that that would be the last of it.

Generally speaking, I should say that the average workman had fixed his mind upon the Elective Assembly, and the only thing he could not understand was why it should be delayed so long in face of the growing dissatisfaction.

I can only speak, of course, of what I saw and heard myself. During the whole of the summer of 1917 I had personally a very agreeable time. I found plenty of work, there was freedom and, at first, a feeling of happy anticipation everywhere. I went to Moscow twice on business and found the workers there even more optimistic than in Petrograd. Still I heard that the soldiers did not want to fight any longer, that there was a great deal of dissatisfaction in the army and that the Bolsheviks were working quietly every-

The Bolshevik Coup

where. A young soldier friend of mine from Cronstadt told me then that Lenin and his party would soon rule Russia and that peace would then be declared. The peasants, he said, would be given the land, and everything would be nationalised. When I ventured to smile at him he sprang at me suddenly and gripped my throat with both hands. He was a big, powerful chap and I had a difficult job to get loose, although knowing the correct way to escape a strangle-hold.

As usual, he apologised afterwards, but in this case I am certain it was not good nature which prompted him. He was, as far as could be seen, an ordinary sailor or soldier, but even at that time had always got plenty of money. On one occasion he showed me 20,000 roubles in his wallet. I do not know where he got them from. I do know that my throat was very sore and I could hardly swallow for a week.

At the end of October (old style) in 1917, as all know, the Bolsheviks with Lenin and Trotsky at their head took possession of Petrograd. It was not done

The Bolshevik Coup

in one day of course, first one place and then another was captured. Sometimes they were retaken by the other side. The central telephone station in the Morskaia for instance changed hands several times and we were without the use of the telephones for several days together. At one time whilst one part of the town was in possession of the Bolsheviks another part would be in the possession of the supporters of the Provisional Government. It was difficult to know at times which side the soldiers were on. I swear that sometimes they were not very clear themselves about the matter. We often had to make many a detour in going home to avoid the firing.

In the ordinary way it would not have been necessary for me to go out so frequently, but as things were constantly getting dearer I undertook a little extra work in the form of acting as translator and reporter for the *Russian Daily News*, and was sometimes sent by them to get information. I often got out and could not get back again and more than once I could not leave the house, the frequent

The Bolshevik Coup

firing all round made it too risky. We seemed to be getting quite used to civil war.

DISSOLVING OF TOWN COUNCIL

The incident which made the strongest impression on my mind at the time of the struggle was the forcible dispersion of the Petrograd town council by the Bolsheviks. I was present at the time in the capacity of reporter. This council had been elected by the whole of the inhabitants of Petrograd, the ballot was secret and the franchise as wide as anything I have heard of in England. The whole procedure of election was modelled on our system.

There is not the slightest reason for suggesting that it represented anything but the *bonâ fide* expression of public opinion.

Among the representatives were many men who had suffered under the old *régime* for the cause of freedom, among them I remember one venerable, lovable old man who had spent more than thirty years as a political prisoner in Siberia.

On the day of this crime—it was nothing

The Bolshevik Coup

less—there was a noise at the doors whilst the council was sitting and a short time after a whole crowd of young soldiers, sailors and armed civilian followers of the Bolsheviks pushed into the council room. There was a hubbub demanding the dispersal of the council. No one seemed to be the leader, it was just a crowd of very irresponsible young men for whom horse-play had a great attraction.

The old councillor to whom I have just referred boldly faced them and told them the story of his imprisonment and exile; he chided and remonstrated and without doubt had a great effect on those who heard him. Half shame-faced, a number of those young Bolsheviks excused themselves on the ground that they were obeying orders. "Ah," replied the old man, "that is exactly what our captors used to say under the old *régime*, they arrested us and said, 'We are ordered to do so'; they beat us and said they had been instructed to do it and now you, whose liberty we fought for, say the same thing."

At this moment it was touch and go,

The Bolshevik Coup

the young men hesitated and were evidently unwilling to use physical force. Someone ran outside and brought in another crowd who had no scruples at all. They bluntly threatened to shoot all the councillors who did not leave instantly, and evidently meant what they said.

The picture of those sad, dignified councillors walking out making what protest they could I shall long remember. The contrast between the coarse and brutal manners of the later comers of armed Bolsheviks and the old men was irresistible in its appeal.

I hold no brief for people who happen to be older or better dressed than others, although in this case the councillors—notably the Mayor—were not specially remarkable for their attire, many of them were comparatively poor men. To this day I am quite unable to see any adequate justification for the dispersal of a body of men who had been freely elected by the people and against whom no suggestion of bribery or wrong-doing had ever even been made.

Every so-called election since that time

The Bolshevik Coup

has been a farce, it does not matter if the election is for the Soviet, House Committee or Trade Union, we were only allowed to elect representatives chosen and settled on by the Bolsheviks beforehand. I will give some details of these elections later. Should a candidate who was not an avowed Bolshevik get elected, the election was promptly declared null and void. Candidates who were considered dangerous were arrested on some trivial charge, and some, like Shingeroff and Kokoshkin, were done to death. Shingeroff I often heard speak, he always struck me as just the kind of man the British workman would trust as a leader. Most people will remember that he and his friend Kokoshkin were murdered by the sailors whilst they were lying ill in the hospital.

I was told by numbers of my friends that it was perfectly well known to all, including the Bolshevik leaders who were the perpetrators of this horrible and cowardly crime, but no one was ever brought to justice.

Having dissolved the Petrograd town council the Bolsheviks took possession of

The Bolshevik Coup

all the administrative posts in the town and proceeded to act as armed dictators. How far the general public was in sympathy with them it is difficult to say, the mass of people were conscious of a good deal of suffering and perhaps hoped that the Bolsheviks would straighten things out.

The latter's chief asset was that most of the more reckless and daring elements had joined them; they feared nothing and stopped at nothing and so were successful in cowing the ordinary quiet men and women. They consolidated the position by direct and indirect terror and taking care that no one except Bolsheviks were allowed to become elected for any post. It was a military victory resembling the kind of thing which might have happened had the Tsar been successful in March.

There being no means by which those opposed to the Bolsheviks could express themselves, a partial strike of administrators and business people resulted. The banks and shops were closed—the last-named because of the open robberies which were constantly going on—and many businesses closed down. This gave the

The Bolshevik Coup

Bolsheviks their chance, they seized banks, shops and all kinds of property, declaring them national property.

It would not be overstating the case if I said that most of the property found its way into the hands of the Commissars, who were being appointed at breakneck speed. I believe some English people think a "People's Commissary" is a kind of Minister of State. So far as I can see he is the most ubiquitous person in Russia, one is always in the background, no matter whether it is a railway station or a food centre; he has not learned for nothing the methods of the old Police, indeed "he has bettered the instruction."

It is possible that in the early days of the Bolshevik revolution a number of these Commissars were sincere men who believed in the doctrines of Bolshevik Communism, but it was evident as time went on that there were not enough idealists to go round, the job quickly fell into the hands of men who could not act as Communists under ordinary conditions, to say nothing of an idealist State.

One case of my personal knowledge will

The Bolshevik Coup

show how property disappeared. In the summer of 1918, when the Soviet Government was all powerful, and the various Commissars had things pretty much their own way, and nearly all the active opponents having been disposed of in some form or other an acquaintance of mine had to work for one of the Commissars, much against his will, his excuse being that he was a married man with two young children. He was a member of his trade union and a very good workman, I had known him almost from the time I arrived in Russia for he was a bookbinder, a trade akin to my own. The bookbinding business stopped, and in order to save himself and his family from starvation he became a kind of furniture remover with a salary of 500 roubles per month and his dinner daily.

It should be noted here that he found this amount quite inadequate and was compelled to sell all his furniture to supplement his income sufficiently to get food.

His business was to go wherever the Commissar sent him for any removal or requisition job. He was one of a group

The Bolshevik Coup

who did this work by the aid of a motor lorry. Out of the many conversations he reported to me I remember one very vividly. His Commissar was talking to a friend and said to him, "You had better have a piano, I know where there is a good one." The friend replied, "Of what use is a piano to me? I can't play." "Oh, never mind," said the Commissar, "a piano looks nice and gives a good tone to the house." Sure enough, the next day my friend was given orders and a requisition form to go to the house of an officer and obtain the piano; he was then to take it to the house of the person to whom it had been promised.

He knocked at the door of the officer's house and showed the victim the requisition form. The officer naturally objected, but was told that any complaint would have to be made to the Commissar, thus starvation was made the instrument by which my bookbinder friend was turned into an unwilling agent for a common thief—under idealist communism.

During the two months he worked for the Commissar, more than forty flats

The Bolshevik Coup

were repeatedly "nationalised," the Commissar or one of his men would say, "That's a nice piece of furniture, drop it in my place," or if the Commissar's own place was full of plunder he would remark, "We will leave it at the house of Comrade So-and-so," one of his friends.

It is quite impossible to remember all the things which were liable to be requisitioned and for which it was a penal offence to be in possession of. The list was a truly formidable one, it was really a risk to be possessed of anything unless one were an active Bolshevik. Bicycles, motor bikes, motor cars, typewriters, and, of course, arms of every kind were on the list. So far as I could see, nothing of value escaped the mesh, the puzzle is to know what became of it all after it was "nationalised."

When one remembers that for any and every kind of offence or the slightest infringement of the endless and overwhelming number of Decrees there were fines, imprisonment, forced labour and often death, it is not difficult to imagine

The Bolshevik Coup

how the Bolsheviks consolidated their position.

The trump card of all was the division of the people into the now famous four categories. Theoretically there was a good deal to be said for a rationing system based on work done, but it worked out as one of the greatest engines of oppression and injustice that was ever devised by the wit of man.

I make no personal complaint, because I was always in the first category—although that did not save me from semi-starvation. The first category included at the commencement all manual workmen and peasants. The second comprised those engaged in clerical work but who did not have more than one employee. The third category was that of employers who had more than one employee, and the fourth consisted of those who lived on rent and interest.

The super-categories to whom this division never applied were the Navy—which was troublesome; the Army, which fed itself; the railway servants, whose strong organisation enabled them to exact

The Bolshevik Coup

terms from the Bolsheviks, and, of course, the Commissar and his immediate friends. These latter were the best fed people in Russia, they had the power to commandeer anything and everything, and used it.

Something might be said for the system if the lowest category could have secured sufficient food to enable them to live, but in a short time the fourth class disappeared altogether. They either escaped from the country, rotted in prison, or quietly starved to death—when they were not shot outright.

Of the other categories little need be said because it soon became evident that only those in the first category could hope to survive and only then by the aid of illicit buying.

Insecurity was made a fine art, and although at first there was a feeling of hope that matters would soon improve, this gradually gave way to despair as regulation after regulation was added to the list, making everyone feel that it was impossible to do anything except by favour of the Bolsheviks. House to house searches, constant arrests—I was arrested at

The Bolshevik Coup

least six times and sometimes kept prisoner for hours. If one asked to see the warrant, a revolver was promptly produced with the remark, "Here is our warrant. That's quite enough for you."

All these things followed on the Bolshevik coup; and had it not been for an invincible belief that such a state of things could not last long, I should, in spite of the privileges I enjoyed, have come home if possible.

Other Englishmen were not nearly so fortunate as myself; some suffered very badly. An American whom I have met lately in London was working on the railways; he was a member of No. 58 Branch, Chicago, of the Steam Shovel Union. He was living in Petrograd with his wife and child. He was arrested as a speculator, a name which about this time was used as a bogey to excite the passion or to stifle the criticism of the people. Nothing availed him—he looked prosperous. In his case the American Consul intervened, but was told, "He is a speculator." "A speculator in what?" asked the Consul. "He had money on

The Bolshevik Coup

him," answered the captors. "How did you know he had money on him until you searched him?" queried the Consul. "He is a speculator," was the only answer. Several of this American's teeth were knocked out by the butt end of a rifle, and the only speculation he had indulged in was to scheme how he could get his wife and child home.

The shout of "speculator" has meant the immediate end of many an unfortunate man.

In May, 1918, I travelled from Vologda to Moscow. The train, which should have reached Moscow about midday, was about twelve hours late. As I left the railway station there was not a cab to be seen. I had not engaged a room, thinking I would arrive according to the time-table when there would have been plenty of time to do so. As the refreshment room was closed and there was nowhere to leave my bag, I strapped it over my shoulder and started in search of a hotel.

I had not proceeded far when someone called out, "Hi! Stop, speculator!" I did not answer, but hurried on. In a

The Bolshevik Coup

moment they called out again, "Stop, or we'll shoot!" and as I still took no notice two shots were fired and my bag fell from my shoulder. I picked it up, and raced for a cab I saw in the distance. Two men armed with revolvers were following hard on my heels. Just in the nick of time three Chinamen emerged from under a bridge with packs on their backs, and my two assailants immediately left me to attend to them, from whom, no doubt, they expected a richer booty. I tumbled into the cab; gasped out "Nearest hotel—ten roubles." Fortunately, I had not far to go. When I got to the hotel and had time to examine the strap which had been over my shoulder I saw that one of the bullets had cut it clean through quite close to the bag. Those Chinamen had saved my life at the probable expense of their own. One can quite understand how the Chinese came to join Trotsky's Red Army later on.

Although at this time the Leaders of the Bolsheviks had at their command a fair number of honest men who were anxious to establish a Socialist Republic as an

The Bolshevik Coup

ideal, there was a good deal of power in the hands of the worst elements.

It was not until later that all power was given to men who had no scruples about anything, and who were content to live on the misery of the workmen and their families.

CHAPTER VI

BOLSHEVISM AT WORK

WHEN the Bolsheviks came into power in November, 1917, the situation was bad, but far from hopeless. Food was certainly dear judged by the old standards, but it was plentiful. For instance, butter could be bought freely at 3 roubles per pound (6s.), a number of the more necessary articles of food, including sugar, were rationed, but it was quite easy to buy as much as one liked—at a price. Everybody was waiting, in spite of the forming of the Soviets (Councils) of the People's Commissaries as they were called, for the result of the election to the Constituent Assembly to be known.

The election took place during the fortnight which followed the coup, and in spite of the ascendancy of the Bolsheviks it was believed they would bow to the

Bolshevism at Work

authority of the National Parliament. They had agitated against the temporary Government because of the delay in the calling together of a Constituent Assembly, and very few dreamed that they would be hostile to what was a democratically elected Parliament for All Russia.

We now know that, under various pretexts, the Bolsheviks refused to allow this Assembly to meet. Delegates came from all parts of Russia into Petrograd, but they might just as well have stopped at home ; in many cases they would have been much wiser and saved themselves untold and endless insults. By the aid of soldiers and armed guards the delegates were prevented from meeting, although they made many attempts to do so and entered many protests.

Authority was transferred to the Soviets, buttressed by armed men.

The forces which were hostile to the Soviets were, on the political side, the Mensheviks, a body very similar to the Independent Labour Party in England, the Social Revolutionaries, also a party of keen Socialists, and the co-operative

Bolshevism at Work

societies. These co-operative societies were the backbone of the constructive side of Russian social life, and had grown enormously in authority and power since the March Revolution. Often they were the only people who seemed to know how to organise for any social need. Their chief weakness was that they did not possess an army of men prepared to kill or destroy all those who did not agree with them. The opposition was crushed after a long and varying struggle, although there never was a time when the Bolsheviks had a majority of people behind them, but they were the only group who were prepared to be quite reckless in their efforts to reach the goal.

Annoyed by newspaper criticisms, they simply declared their opponents counter-revolutionary and suppressed them without mercy. It was not long before every paper, except those run entirely by the Bolsheviks, was suppressed. One exception should be mentioned. A German paper the *Neue Petrograder Zeitung* was allowed to continue. I read it often. The substance of its matter and policy

Bolshevism at Work

was to please the Bolsheviks and say "in Germany alone will be found the real friends of the proletariat."

For the rest there was nothing to read but the Bolshevik papers.

The first test of the capacity to govern a nation is to find out if the would-be governors can feed the people. Since my return to England I have often been asked questions about the blockade, as though that had anything to do with the starving of people in Russia. Whoever heard of food being exported to Russia? The whole thing is ridiculous, what food shortage may exist is entirely due to an *internal blockade* made by the Bolsheviks in pursuit, let us charitably suppose, of an ideal.

I will explain as I go along, but first as to the facts.

Speaking of the towns, the position is dreadful beyond all description. I was in many of the towns at one time or another in 1918 and can testify that in every place the struggle to get food is the one thing which dominates all else. Home life is one everlasting struggle to obtain food.

Bolshevism at Work

The decrees would make people imagine that a very fair basis has been arranged, at least for first category workmen, but it had not for a long time been possible to secure even a small part of the allowance which appears on the ration card. It is only by illicit buying that one could hope to survive, and that hope is now gone owing to the refusal of those who possess food in the villages to part with it for paper money. I was given a post later on under the new Education Minister, Lunarcharsky, as chief photographer, and took it for the not unimportant reason that I thought that working directly under the Bolsheviks might enable me to get more food. I thought I might perhaps be fed like the Red Guards, but it was not so. We had quarters in the Winter Place, and delightful quarters they were, those which the late Tsar used to occupy overlooking the Neva ; but somehow a hungry man is seldom much struck with the beauty of his surroundings or the nobleness of ideals. My salary was 1,500 roubles (£150) per month, but it might just as well have been 15s. for all the use it became later on.

Bolshevism at Work

I was simply driven to seek my food fortune in the hostile villages.

We were allowed to exchange our food cards for a dinner once a day at a public restaurant. The dinner in December consisted of a basin of watery soup with a small onion as the only visible thing in it, this was followed by a second course of very salt fish and one-eighth of a pound of bread—black bread, of course.

In December last we were without bread for six consecutive days.

On one occasion some women were standing near me : hearing that I was an Englishman they called out, " Oh, when are the Allies coming to save us from this terrible torture ? " They added, " We pray on our knees every day that an end may soon come to our starvation and terror." Every day after this as long as I continued to go to this dining place they used to say, " How long ? " or " How shall we endure all this ? " " Surely they will never leave us to starve to death." One incident, which occurred frequently, but which I personally saw only once, was the sudden raid on the glass case.

Bolshevism at Work

In a glass case in the dining place I frequented a sample dinner was displayed each day. This is done to enable the diner to compare what is served to him with what he ought to have. One day standing quite close to me was a young fellow apparently looking intently for leavings of our dinners, but every now and then gazing anxiously at the displayed dinner in the middle of the room.

Suddenly I heard a crash and everybody in the place jumped up in alarm—nerves were always on edge in Petrograd. On looking up I saw that this poor starved creature had knocked over the glass case and before anyone could recover from their surprise he had crammed the food into his mouth with both hands and tried to get away.

The manager caught him and was evidently intending to give him to the first Red Guard he could find, and would have done so but for several of the women who offered to pay for the damage done, and one woman in a burst of pity gave him her food coupon for the day. How I grew to hate these public dining places ; the long

Bolshevism at Work

queue in which I had to wait for my ticket, then the queue for the dinner itself. Scores of times I have waited from thirty to fifty minutes before getting the only meal of the day.

What could one do? The dinners cost $3\frac{1}{2}$ roubles (about 7s.) in December, and if you wanted to buy a piece of bread in the street it would cost 5 roubles for quite a tiny biscuit of black bread, and that very often composed of half potato flour. At one time they gave us oats instead of bread, but not being a horse they were useless to me.

Before you had the right to dine at one of these places it was first necessary to get a special ration card. This in itself was an endless and troublesome process. Having secured this card you had to go and get registered at one or the other of these dining-rooms for a certain period. You could only dine at one place and you had to get registered where you could.

In the first days of January there was a delay in the issue of these cards in our house, and it was not until the new year was three days gone that we obtained them.

Bolshevism at Work

In consequence we were too late to register anywhere, so that even the small comfort of the public dinner was denied us. We had to depend on stealth for all we could get plus our bread ration of half a pound of bread for the first category men. My own wages, being the highest paid, enabled me to buy anything which could be got at first—later I will show how I had been enabled to get food in the country from time to time; but for the bulk of work-people, especially those with families, it must have been too dreadful even to think about. To see the women hunting for food would break the heart of a stone. A horse falls in the street and one would see the women cutting the head from the body and others cutting pieces which could be conveniently carried home.

I have seen similar sights in some other towns; as I write I shudder at the memory of some of the daily scenes.

That the Bolsheviks have failed to feed the people and that, in a land where food is normally plentiful and where plenty of food still exists, is a true bill. Why they have failed is, of course, the question which

Bolshevism at Work

has to be answered and for which there are many reasons. No one suggests that they *want* to starve the people, but I think it my duty to show how their policy has produced this result, and further that the present Bolshevik Government are incapable of remedying the matter. They no longer control their own machine, instead the monster controls them.

The first mistake was the immediate closing of all the privately owned shops before either machinery or suitable distributing agencies were available. The ideal of Communism is a State where no private trade exists and therefore the Bolsheviks in many cases, without waiting an instant, suppressed all private trading.

Knowing as I do how strong they have been and how far they have gone, even down to ruining the economic life of the country, in pursuit of the ideal, I was a little puzzled at the overtures from Lenin a little time ago to American capitalists for help in exchange for "concessions."

The closing of food distributing shops without preparation to replace them was a real disaster. After a time the co-opera-

Bolshevism at Work

tive societies were able to meet some of the more glaring evils which arose. Everyone who could, including the teachers, formed a co-operative society, but in December most of the co-operative societies were suppressed on the ground that they were counter-revolutionary. The words "counter-revolutionary" had almost as magical an effect as the word "speculator"—the slightest whisper was enough.

So far as the co-operative societies were concerned their real crime was being anti-Bolshevik; I never heard of a Bolshevik Co-operative Society. In spite of their suppression, I believe they will be the nuclei around which the people of Russia will rally when they get a chance.

The next mistake was the fixing of the price of flour at which the peasants must sell. The actual price varied in different districts, in the district where I lived it was fixed at 17.50 roubles per pood (40 lb.). At that time 17 roubles had very little purchasing power, a second-hand pair of boots, for instance, would fetch 150 roubles and a new pair anything from 400 to 600 roubles.

Bolshevism at Work

Moreover, those who had flour to sell would get from ten to forty times the fixed price by illicit sales to hungry men and women. For a time a little flour could be bought in exchange for paper money, but very soon the peasants began to see that the paper money was almost valueless, they could purchase nothing with it. This was another of the sinister blows at all security. The everlasting issue of paper money simply had the effect of reducing its value to zero.

How many thousands of millions of paper money have been printed I do not know ; it is doubtful if anyone does. I do know that the printing of paper money is the only really zealous industry in the country. Recently they have reduced the note to a quarter of its original size. I have at the moment over 2,000 paper roubles and find in London that no one will give me anything for them. Several peasants have shown me small stacks of "roubles" and speak of them now as having so much weight of them.

Before the value of the rouble had become so debased the Bolshevik Govern-

Bolshevism at Work

ment, in answer to the piteous cries of the hungry in the towns, did permit a week or so of free trade. This had the best of results, the peasants sold the food and the townsfolk parted with their roubles. The Government did not permit a very long use of the privilege of free trade ; presumably it was too great a blow at their principles of Communism, so by enforcing the old decrees they stopped it and made the old penalties for private trading operate once more. This seemed to me a terrible blunder. Although the rouble was of such little value the peasant would have been only too glad to have parted with his hoarded and hidden food stocks if he could have got some manufactured articles in exchange ; he was always willing to barter.

I found this out when I travelled to the villages in search of food during the summer ; at first they repulsed me and said they had nothing to sell. After a time I asked if I could repair anything and never failed to get food in exchange for my work.

It is possible that there may be a general

Bolshevism at Work

shortage of certain kinds of foods over the whole of Bolshevik Russia, but I am quite sure that there is enough food still hoarded in the villages in Northern Russia to prevent, quite easily, a living soul from starving for another two years.

It was admitted that the harvest last year was exceptionally fruitful. I know it was because I have seen the hidden results of it. What will happen this year it is difficult to say. The Soviets have commandeered so many horses at a price which would be laughable if it was not so tragic, and money will not purchase others. Cows have been killed in great numbers and agricultural implements are not to be had.

I propose to deal with the factory questions in another part of this book in which it is shown that production in the factories has almost ceased; in many cases they are places where men go and talk and preserve their bread cards. The opening up of trade with Western Europe will undoubtedly ease this situation, but it must not be assumed that factories ought to be idle because European imported

Bolshevism at Work

goods do not come in. The raw material is there, I have seen stacks of raw material, iron in abundance, and for fuel there is enough wood in Russia to serve every purpose. I have seen hundreds of locomotives lying in the open rusting from disuse.

The core of the trouble is that there are few people who know how to run factories, and these few have been, well—demobilised. Brute force and incompetent management do not seem the best allies for producing good results in a factory. There may be poetic justice in placing the porter of a factory in supreme control, but somehow even poetic justice will fail to produce badly-needed goods.

In case it may be thought that I am trying to be cynical at the expense of truth, I may add that over and over again the Commissar who has been placed in charge of factories that I know is often the least competent person to be given so important a post. He has been selected almost solely on account of his zeal for Bolshevik principles and sometimes for less worthy personal assets.

Bolshevism at Work

The total of these various considerations makes the lamentable result of a starving population. Economic life has completely broken down owing to an internal blockade devised to produce exactly the opposite results. If the peasants and the townsfolk were Communists, and understood that Communism implied responsibility and the necessity for all to produce and freely exchange, something might be said for it; but the whole position in Russia makes this ideal impossible of achievement at the present time, especially in an atmosphere so charged with suspicion and insecurity as at present.

Since the towns have been unable to send the necessary manufactured articles into the country and the peasants realised the worthlessness of paper money, the country had ceased willingly to send food into the towns. They have hidden it away.

This action embittered the starving workmen in the towns. It embittered them so much that the Soviets had to do something. In November and December last they openly advised the factory

Bolshevism at Work

workmen to arm themselves and go into the factory to get food.

This they did with the result that there were many shootings and disorders, but little food. By the time I left Russia the feud between the townsman and the peasant was growing more and more bitter. The Soviets who had advised the raids must have known that only goods would tempt the peasant to part with his stocks of food. They had always been sending their Red Guards to procure food from the villagers at the point of the revolver or rifle, and yet had failed. The peasant would submit to being shot, and often was shot, rather than disclose the hiding places. He reasoned that if he parted with his food the whole family would starve, himself included; by being shot he might at least save his family. So far as the workmen were concerned they were no more to blame than the peasant. It is a dreadful thing to see one's family suffering from starvation; it was made the more exasperating by the knowledge that there was food enough in the country if it could be obtained.

Bolshevism at Work

Although transport had to a large extent broken down, no difficulty could possibly be experienced in getting food home, the men would have carried it on their backs. My sympathies were naturally with the men in the towns, and yet I could not help seeing that it was too much to expect the hard-worked peasants to give up their precious grain—their life work, so to speak—for worthless paper.

Time and time again the peasants promised flour if only they would be given something useful in exchange. Such things as cloth, leather, cooking utensils, agricultural tools and implements would have quickly produced all the necessary food. In some districts which I traversed in November last it was not possible to secure needles or thread. For any of these things they would have bartered their foodstuffs, but for paper money—no, unless compelled by force, and force seldom produces much. In the factories, partly as a result of the slender diet and partly through bad management and idleness, and to some extent through the lack of certain kinds of raw material, the output after

Bolshevism at Work

the Bolsheviks "nationalised" the factories was in many cases as low as five per cent. in comparison with the old standard. The average was seldom more than fifteen per cent. throughout all the industries in December. These figures are given not only as the result of my own observation, but they were confirmed by a Bolshevik professor who was in constant touch with the higher Soviet in Moscow.

The Bolshevik leaders have constantly admitted, both in their newspapers and by their speakers, that there is plenty of food in Soviet Russia to feed the whole population. They blame the peasants for their obstinacy and talk of "counter-revolutionaries."

It was impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that the real food blockade is a form of passive resistance adopted by the peasants to save themselves from being compelled to accept worthless paper-money in exchange for the fruits of their toil.

The only people who are able to break this internal blockade are certain of the women who have friends or relatives in the country. No one, except soldiers of

Bolshevism at Work

the Red Army, can hope to be successful. The women who can, go back to their old home in the village, and others make visits on foot or by train in order to bring back food if they can succeed in evading the vigilant eyes of the Red Guards. Some fail even after they have obtained the food. On one occasion I was in a train which was stopped at a station in order that the Guards might search the passengers. A woman in the same carriage was found to be in possession of 30 lb. of flour. The Guards, all as usual very young men, took it from her. She pleaded with them, and went down on her knees begging to be allowed to retain some for her starving children at home. The Guards took no notice and the last I saw was the woman crying and dragging herself along on her knees. It was impossible for me or any man to have said a word without a bullet quickly finding another victim. The women protested and protested loudly. For quite a long while women have been the only people who dare to protest. In a little while we heard that the poor woman had thrown herself under

Bolshevism at Work

the train rather than face her children at home empty-handed. The remainder of the journey was very mournful, the passengers talking of nothing but the fate of this poor woman. The hatred expressed for the Red Guards and their leaders was very intense.

I find it quite impossible to get away from the thoughts of the starvation in Russia. For the first three weeks I was in London I could hardly pass a food shop without wanting to rush in at once to buy. It seemed so strange to see the windows of shops loaded with food of all kinds. Time after time I have stopped to look filled with wonderment and wishing I could send it to those I have left behind, and then I remembered that as things are only the Red Guards would get it.

There are some folk in England who think the children get food because of the known work of Lunarcharsky in the schools. Unfortunately, this is not the case; there was a time when it was partially true, but the attempt to keep children fed has broken down in spite of the work of Lunarcharsky and his helpers. The

Bolshevism at Work

children still get some, but bare'y enough to keep them alive, certainly not enough to keep them healthy.

On th ration cards are to be found coupons for most of the necessities of life, but already in November last it began to be practically impossible to get much on them except bread, and even that failed sometimes. Private trading having been put under a ban and the municipal shops set up in their places having precious little stock of anything, one had to fall back on the risky and expensive business of buying from the vendors of food smuggled by stealth into the town.

Every day the mother had to hunt—yes, literally to hunt—to find food. In one house I knew the mother and father who both went to work and earned between them 2,500 roubles per month, and yet their two children, boys of four and eight respectively, were often crying with hunger on the days when there was no school.

It would be impossible to give too much credit to Lunarcharsky for his work ; I worked for him and knew him

Bolshevism at Work

well. He is a very intellectual type of man with just the tinge of a dreamy look. That he is a sincere idealist is beyond doubt; he was not only always talking of his ideals, but was practising them also. He worked day and night and was accessible to all who could or would help his educational work. In my judgment Lunarcharsky is the sincerest man in the Bolshevik movement. The contrast between him and Trotsky is unmistakable. It is much easier to see the King of England than Trotsky in Russia.

Last spring I had to go to Moscow on business for my chief, and for this journey I had to get a permit from Trotsky. I went to the Smolny and was then told to write the nature of my business and to produce my passport. This passed me from the first to the second sentry, who again made me state my business. After a time he gave me a permit and the number of the room to which I had to go. This passed me on through six more sentries to an ante-room where a lady secretary came and asked me to write the nature of my business, which was to get permission to

Bolshevism at Work

go to Moscow where I had to repair some machines. I wrote it down as requested and in about an hour she came back again for the paper. After that I was compelled to wait over four hours, and at last was conducted between two Red Guards into the presence of Trotsky. I was halted a little distance away, and was asked by the secretary why I needed to go to Moscow. Trotsky heard my answer, "to repair some machines in a Russian factory," the permit was signed and I was again conducted by the two Guards back to the waiting-room and a pass handed me without which it would have been impossible for me to leave the building. I may add that this permit was not considered sufficient by the lady of Jewish extraction who presided at that time over the Petrograd evacuation committee at the Marine Palace, and I was compelled after all to get another permit signed by the Commissar for foreign affairs before I received the final permit which enabled me to take my place in the queue waiting to buy railway tickets.

From the very moment the Bolsheviks

Bolshevism at Work

came into power the principle of permits began to be extended to every detail of one's life, and by the time I left it had gone so far that one could not even buy a single blacklead or a sheet of notepaper without first getting a permit signed by several committees and the local Soviet. Generally by the time one had succeeded in getting the necessary permit it was too late. The need for the article had passed by, or another way had been found out of the difficulty.

CHAPTER VII

FACTORIES AND TRADE UNIONS

TRADE UNIONS were formed soon after the March revolution ; having little or nothing to guide them the leaders devised rules which were lifted straight from the rule books of English, American and Continental trade unions.

This resulted in a constant changing of the rules ; in some cases rules were changed every month, and it is doubtful if the leaders could follow the many alterations. The members regarded the raising of wages as the main, if not the only, purpose of the unions ; the consequence was that most of the energy was spent in accomplishing this end.

The sweeping rises only resulted in reducing the value of money and making everything dearer. At first this error was not made plain ; for one thing there was no

Factories and Trade Unions

one to explain the elements of economics, and it is doubtful if much notice would have been taken if there had been, a rise of wages is too intoxicating to be resisted by an appeal to economic theory. Another reason was that they were able at first to draw upon the reserves of money and materials and so the error would be unnoticed.

Another feature was the shortening of hours, which of itself might easily have proved a great advantage ; the long hours previously worked had resulted in a great deal of "going easy" and wasted time, but this possible advantage was more than lost by the fact that shop discipline became much more lax than before. Hour after hour was spent in discussion and it did not appear to be anyone's place to push on the ordinary work.

By the time the Bolsheviks became the Government the factories could barely have paid their way, afterwards they became hopeless. The first bad blunder was the driving out by various means of all managers and specialists who would not declare themselves Bolshevik. The

Factories and Trade Unions

managers were replaced by amateur committees formed of workmen who had never had any experience in the problems of management.

This produced a condition in which the cost of materials was constantly rising and causing them to become increasingly scarce. To meet the difficulty a vicious circle was entered into of further raising both wages and prices. In addition there was a great reduction in the number of customers who had the capacity to pay.

The "State," to meet these difficulties, stepped in and made up the deficit in wages. As each factory ceased to show a profit, there was no income from which wages could be paid except by this subsidy. This was the cause of the rapid printing of paper money, it being practically the only means the Soviet had of paying the wages. The effect was naturally to still further reduce the purchasing value of the rouble.

A little later many of the healthy young men were conscripted by the Bolsheviks to add to the Red Army which was needed to keep down the rebellious

Factories and Trade Unions

elements which had begun quite early to express their dissatisfaction and disgust at the starvation and want. Many joined the army of their own accord in order to get food, and it often happened that they were the more skilled workmen and were really necessary to industry. The starvation lowered the vitality of the workmen and even had they been willing there was bound to be a reduced output. The output in the factories soon became so low that the workmen wanted all they produced for their own needs and had none to spare for sale in exchange for food.

Towards the end of last year I visited a number of workshops which had been requisitioned by the Soviets in company with two Bolshevik Commissars. To see these places, which were once flourishing concerns giving employment to hundreds of workmen, now lying idle, the machines rusting and covered with dust gave me a most unpleasant sensation—it seemed like walking through a city of graves. I asked what was going to be done with them and was told that great central workshops were to be opened to replace them.

Factories and Trade Unions

In England if factories were closed in this way the trade unions would direct some of their energies into finding out a remedy, but this was impossible under the Soviet. If a trade union did not please the higher Soviet it was fined and suppressed and a new union formed in its place by the Bolsheviks themselves. Entry to this new union was only open to members of the old union who signed a form declaring themselves entirely in agreement with, and prepared completely to support in every detail the policy of the Soviet Government.

Refusal to join on these terms meant the loss of the work and the salary, together with exclusion from both the first and second categories. It will readily be understood how serious a matter it was to oppose any coercive measure.

Every incentive was held out to the poorer people to spy and report on the others. A workman or a girl who gave information that any member of the trade union was opposed in any way to the Soviet system was specially rewarded. He or she would be given extra food and pro-

Factories and Trade Unions

moted as soon as possible to a seat upon the executive of the union or a place on the factory committee.

Action was taken against several trade unions as a whole ; a notable instance was the Teachers' Union, which was declared counter-revolutionary—that blessed word “counter-revolutionary.” In consequence the schools were without teachers. This happened just before I came away ; what was the end of it all I am unable to say. With regard to our own union, the printers', our books were declared invalid about the end of October and red cards were issued to all those who signed a new form declaring themselves Bolsheviks. Without one of these red cards no one was considered a member of the union.

I went into several factories about the time these new forms were being issued and noticed that everybody wrote “Yes” to one of the two questions. On each occasion I asked the man I knew best at each place, “How many real Bolsheviks do you number?” The numbers varied from two to not more than six. In each of these factories there were over 500

Factories and Trade Unions

people employed. At one factory I was told that the only Bolshevik was the Commissar.

It will be asked, as I often asked, "Why did they sign the forms?" The answer is simple. Unless the forms were signed the individual who refused would lose his ration card, and if a number stood out the factory was closed. I left both questions blank and was only admitted after a good deal of discussion by pleading that I was a foreigner and that I had several papers, each of which showed that I was necessary to the running of a factory. I rather fancy, however, that one of the officials filled up "Yes" to each of the questions for me, in order to save trouble after I had left.

In December yet another form was issued in our union, but as I had then quite decided to leave I did not go through the process again.

The elections for the various posts in our union and local Soviet were an absolute farce. I had a vote and naturally consulted with friends whom to vote for. They laughed at me and said it was all

Factories and Trade Unions

arranged, "we have been told who to vote for." I knew some of these "nominated" men quite well, and will go no further than saying they were not the best workmen. It is a simple truth that no one except he be a Bolshevik was allowed to be elected for any post

I suppose I can claim to know something of trade unions, I can most emphatically state that no trade union which would be looked at in England exists in Soviet Russia, other than the union of the railwaymen, all the others are creatures of the Bolsheviks and dare not call their souls their own except at the price of being starved to death.

A number of minor reasons could be given for the breakdown of economic life, but one must not be overlooked because it has such an enormous effect. It is the creation and enormous increase in the number of Government departments, all of which are non-producing and act as a clog on the movements of the whole machine, although they were presumably established to accelerate its working.

All buying and selling for the factories,

Factories and Trade Unions

for instance, had to be done through the Soviet Narodny Hoziestvo (Council of People's Economy). This caused endless delay and unnecessary work in actual practice. Everyone who could, got into the Government offices, and the number of these non-productive positions increases every week. Once a man gets into a Government office life becomes one continual struggle to make his position secure and to get food. Little, if any, attempt is made to carry out any consecutive scheme of work.

When I reflect on the immense organisation which has grown up in order to carry out the most trivial details I feel like having lived or passed through a nightmare. On one occasion I brought some goods from the country for the Soviet Institute and had to see four different officials in one building, each of them after a delay of several hours. It took two days to do this preliminary part, the officials only work from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. with two hours for lunch. These are official times and not the product of my imagination. The third day I had to

Factories and Trade Unions

see another official whose office was in a different part of the town, his hours were only from 2 to 4 p.m. On the fourth day I had to return to the first building, when, after waiting several hours in a queue, I got a permit, and on the fifth day I went back to the station and at length received the goods. All told it took exactly a week to get the formalities attended to of a simple matter like the delivery of goods from the railway station which were there at the order of the Soviet Institute. All these formalities needed an army of useless officials.

An incident describing the actual method and attitude of a Commissar may be interesting. This officer stalked in with the air of an owner of slaves; all the workpeople stood still with their caps off just as was done under the old Tsarist *régime*. They were just as much, if not more, frightened of this "comrade" than of the Chief of Police. No one spoke a word, the "comrade" flicked some papers and then went to the telephone. I remember almost the exact words of his conversation, "Is that you, Jim? . . . I

Factories and Trade Unions

will be able to get them for you . . . Yes, that was a nice bit of stuff last night."

This "comrade" had the power of life and death, and was obviously the kind of man who had never enjoyed responsibility before ; he was bursting with importance and only too anxious to display his new-given power.

I asked him to sign my permit. He replied with a jerk, "What do you want?" I told him. He looked at the paper and grunted, "Next door." As I walked out I noticed he was lighting a cigarette with an obvious air of disdain for the unfortunate workmen who were compelled to wait upon his pleasure and for whom even the coarsest tobacco, not to mention cigarettes, had long since been unobtainable.

So many forms were needed for all kinds of purposes that a special decree was issued in November limiting the size and number of the sheets and recommending that the smallest type possible should be used.

One's life became bounded on all sides by forms and permits. Permits were

Factories and Trade Unions

needed for practically everything. If I tried I could not make a list of them, and fortunately I cannot remember more than a very few, the list alone would fill a book. Every day the Bolshevik papers used to publish columns of decrees, sometimes even two to three pages of them. Disobedience of any of these decrees meant fines or the loss of ration cards, if not worse. I doubt if anyone ever read these decrees, certainly the people did not, consequently it became the only safe thing to assume that one had no rights at all except by favour of the Bolsheviks.

The one organised body of workmen which has succeeded in holding their own against the Bolsheviks are the railwaymen. Thanks to their strong organisation and advantageous position, they have always been more or less independent of the Bolshevik Government. Attempts of course have often been made to obtain control, but have been beaten back in every case. The railwaymen have only to threaten to hold up the very few trains which now run and immediately the Bolsheviks give in.

Factories and Trade Unions

Long after white bread had disappeared entirely in the towns, the conductors in the trains—there is at least one conductor to every carriage—always had as much as they required.

When decrees were issued prohibiting the import of food by private people the various railway servants were practically exempt from searching, a privilege which meant a good deal.

Only very few trains are run now. One, or at most two, a day between the large towns, and the travelling is a slow torture. Russian trains were never very fast, but they were comfortable and homely. The carriages are wider than English carriages and all have corridors. The difference between the first and second-class carriages was in the number of sleeping places. In the first-class two people had the same room as three in the second-class. Third-class represented a great drop, more people were provided for, and one had to be content with bare boards for seats.

I have never travelled fourth-class, but I have often used the *Teplushkas* (covered-in vans with a stove in the middle) which,

Factories and Trade Union

although they look rough, are not nearly so bad as one might imagine. Seats are generally improvised out of planks of wood and padded with luggage. A bed could also be improvised out of the same materials. Nearly all bring a cushion and a blanket with them. Tea is made over the stove and shared all round.

During the journey people sit round the stove and relieve the tedium of the journey with music and story telling. Another group might be seen playing cards by the light of the stump of a candle.

Originally it was delightful to travel by train, the people were sociable, meals were arranged in common, and books and newspapers exchanged.

Until Bolshevism came into the towns it was quite easy to get all one wanted at wayside stations ; at nearly every station there was a place where boiling water for making tea could be obtained ; in fact, to travel on the Russian railways was a source of great pleasure and interest—at least to me.

Now all is changed, changed utterly. Before one can board a train permits are

Factories and Trade Unions

necessary, you are liable to constant searching and possible arrest, and you feel very glad to get out of what is virtually a prison as long as you are on board.

Few trains are now run. Towards the end of last year a great reduction took place owing to the shortage of locomotives. On one journey I counted up to 800 locomotives rusting away on the sidings. They are not idle for lack of fuel; it is simply the loss of the men who are capable of keeping them in repair, often the hated *bourgeoisie*. I used to think that *bourgeoisie* meant a prosperous merchant, a middle-class swell, but in Russia it means at the moment anyone who is not a Bolshevik. Goodness me! if the English workmen only knew what Bolshevism really is—there—I don't know. What is it that has deceived so many of them?

CHAPTER VIII

HOW THE BOLSHEVIKS KEEP IN POWER

THE force under cover of which the Bolsheviks are able to keep the people in a state of terrorism and subjection is the Red Army. I suppose all tyrannies have been maintained by an army in some form, but I have never heard of a tyranny which extends to allowing a body of men to do exactly as they like in exchange for a professed belief in a political creed—a creed which is humorously called "Communism."

Originally this army may have been formed by recruiting from men who held the faith of Lenin, but the number was hopelessly insufficient to cope with the continual outbreaks of opposition. Conscription was imposed to meet this difficulty ; the first conscription took the form of bribes in the way of food, etc.

How the Bolsheviks

Red Guards were given about four times the ration of a first category workman and an average of 120 roubles per month. There is no doubt that the majority of those who voluntarily enlisted did so in order to avoid starvation. I had a number of friends who told me that they did so solely for this reason.

Another reason for a man joining was, in many cases, to secure for his father immunity from Forced Labour. Understand I am a confirmed believer that everyone should work. I have done so myself since the age of eleven, as my family was in need of my small earnings, but forced labour under the Bolsheviks reminds one of the stories of the old slave days and the crime of the people who are condemned to this slavery consisted in their being *bourgeoisie* and not signing a declaration of belief in Bolshevism. These men and their wives and families were, temporarily at least, saved by their sons' sacrifice.

In every case a strong hold was kept over both the conscript and the volunteer by the method of punishing or shooting

Keep in Power

the nearest male relative if the soldier deserted or was guilty of an offence. This happened often and the tragedy of the father continually worrying if his son had got into trouble was pitiable. He was seldom told what had gone wrong ; "justice" was simply and speedily administered.

The soldier was given many privileges denied to a first category workman, the chief of which was to have licence to do pretty well as he liked. I have been told of a local decree announcing the conscription of women. This surprises me, because there was never any need for it ; the soldier had merely to offer the priceless bribe of food and protection, and never had the slightest need to have women conscripted.

When a band of soldiers got away from the centres their licence was unlimited, they did just as they dared with the people. They would requisition anything they wanted, goods, foodstuffs, anything and everything, and if anyone had the courage to ask for their authority, they presented a rifle or a revolver and said, "That was

How the Bolsheviks

their authority." This has happened to me personally, although at the time I was in the employ of the Soviet.

If the soldiers complained that their beds were hard, the people were compelled, according to their supposed means, to provide clean new mattresses for them. Beds were requisitioned from the civil population, and carpenters, painters and workmen were commandeered to fit up palaces and institutes for their accommodation whilst the barracks were being renovated inside and out in full accordance with the demands of the Red Army.

When complaints were made, plenty of "counter-revolutionaries" were discovered and suitably punished. At one time Trotsky said, "If a people must have an army it ought not to lack necessities." I do not quarrel with this statement, but in Soviet Russia it amounted to this, that the army were to have everything at the expense of everyone else, including workmen and even children. All went hungry that the army might be sated; civilians could not have boots and clothes so that the Red Guards with their female friends

Keep in Power

could swagger about in fur-lined top-coats and boots.

Did the workmen in a factory demand more bread they had first to prove that their work was necessary to the army—if that was so they got it; but if not they were warned to keep quiet or else the factory would be closed and they would find themselves without money or bread.

Whilst the people were literally starving the Red Guards were able to get nearly all they wanted, including luxuries, so far as they existed in Soviet Russia. No one would describe the Red Army as a disciplined force. I saw about 8,000 of them march through Petrograd in December. The front ranks and the soldiers on horseback were passable, but the rear ranks were a very motley crowd. All sorts of combinations of costumes, a sailor in a bowler or a cap, others half-soldiers and half-civilians and quite a number without arms. I do not know the motive for this march through Petrograd, but it was not impressive, and in ordinary circumstances one would have laughed; but to a

How the Bolsheviks

defenceless, starving people it was quite sufficiently menacing.

In the Red Army are many Chinese soldiers. Whether they came specially or were simply the gathering together of the Chinese who lived in Soviet Russia I cannot say. They were there ; one cannot imagine they would have any scruples, even if they were not convinced Communists.

Quite apart from the bribe of food and licence, there was another means by which the army was kept together. This was the spy system.

Spies abounded everywhere, spies on spies, and spies to watch the spies who had to watch the first line of spies.

So far as I could see, no one was above suspicion, and no one's signature was assurance against arrest, this system applied to the army as well as to civilians.

When papers were shown the remark was frequently heard, " We do not doubt your papers are genuine, but we cannot trust the men who have signed them." No one was trusted, and no one was safe. The secretary of the Bolshevik Institute

Keep in Power

told me that Lunarcharsky himself had barely escaped arrest on two occasions. An engineer connected with our Soviet Institute was once arrested and kept in prison for a week. No one in the Institute knew where he was; he was a signed Bolshevik, of course, and belonged to the first (workmen's) category. When he was eventually released neither he nor anyone else ever heard or learned the reason of his arrest and imprisonment.

Parents with sons in the Red Army lived in constant fear of their lives, never knowing when they might be called upon to disappear.

At any moment, night or day, everyone was liable to arrest, to have their rooms searched, and their persons also. One can understand why it was better to be a Red Guard and do the searching instead of being searched.

The spy system worked both ways in the army. Men could have the privilege of acting as spies themselves, or of acting as agents for them in return for the pleasure of themselves being spied upon.

The system of espionage made it prac-

How the Bolsheviks

practically impossible for anyone to call together even a few workmen to discuss anything which would be considered anti-Bolshevik. The Commissar would immediately summon a party of the Red Army to enforce any demand. His readiness was only equalled by the readiness of the Red Guards to use their weapons.

When it is remembered that the only form of punishment possible was fine or death—the fine meant practically death by starvation—it became the rule to say every time a threat was made, “You will be shot.”

A young friend of mine who had been in the Red Army almost from the first, and had previously been one of the staunchest supporters of the principles taught by Lenin and Trotsky, said to me in December last that not only he himself, but every one of his friends who had heartily supported the Bolshevik coup were now, in consequence of what they had seen and experienced during the past year, utterly opposed to it both in principle and practice.

He many a time told me he would like

Keep in Power

to escape from it all. He would certainly have come away with me had it not been that his parents would have had to pay the full penalty for his desertion. He said that in his company not one of the original members were now real Bolsheviks, but that there were amongst them a few spies—who they were, no one actually knew—and that in little more than two weeks sixteen of the soldiers had disappeared. They comprised a group which had dared to criticise the powers a little more openly than the rest.

My own position was relatively safe in the town, although I was twice arrested with others, and, in spite of all protests, taken to the nearest Commissar. In each case I was released after showing my papers, which I had received from their own committee.

In the country I was not so fortunate ; I was threatened in several villages that I would be shot as an English spy. This was not done by words only, rifles and revolvers were also pointed at me. In each case I managed to convince them that as my papers showed I was a workman, by the

How the Bolsheviki

most practical of all ways. I set to work and repaired machines, in one case a boiler on which the whole village depended. The peasants said, "Well, even if he should be a spy, he is very useful; let him stay."

In some cases I became quite friendly with the men who had previously threatened me. One Commissar who had hurled at me the vilest epithets he could think of, and nearly made me lose my temper, a thing which is about the most dangerous mistake to make in Russia, left me on friendly terms after an hour's conversation. The next time I met him he said, "My best respects, glad to meet you. Will you kindly come to tea on Sunday?" I did so and found him a very agreeable companion. This is the paradox of Russia—the wildest extremes of passion and the greatest difficulty of understanding the point of view of others. Once people can be got to understand the point of view of each other they are as generous as they were violent before.

I well recollect a long conversation I had about this time—July—with a member of the Petrograd Soviet of Soldiers' and

Keep in Power

Workmen's Deputies. At the conclusion he said to me, "What a pity that we Russian workmen and soldiers cannot get into closer touch with English (British) workmen and soldiers. Your people seem to have attained to all that we really need in the way of freedom for the present, I had no idea before that you enjoyed so large a measure of liberty. I really thought you were almost as badly oppressed as we were," *i.e.*, under the Tsar's rule.

Only last November a member of our own house committee, quite an unusually intelligent workman, said to me in perfect seriousness, "Do you mean to tell me that you were freer in England, in 1914, say, than we were under the old Tsarist *régime*?" I thought at first he must be joking, since he was a young man with an education quite above the ordinary, as he was able to talk and read both Russian and German; but I was eventually convinced that he really thought that we were no better off than they were before the Revolution.

These are only two examples out of many I could give. Both these persons were workmen and quite above the average.

How the Bolsheviks

If *they* knew so little about the real state of things outside Russia, imagine if you can what ideas the vast mass of the people had about us. It seems impossible to plumb the depths of their ignorance. I know I shall be told that our people are ignorant enough—granted, but here we have such abysmal darkness that I am firmly convinced that no one who has not talked with the people himself can even faintly imagine it.

I did not see so much of the sailors as of the Red Guard, but I know that in the first revolution the navy played a great part, and followed this up by giving assistance on several occasions to the Provisional Government in restoring order.

Generally speaking, the sailors were much better educated than the soldiers, and certainly held themselves to be superior in every way. Whether this was the case, I cannot say for sure. To a lesser extent they supported the Bolsheviks in the autumn of 1917: those of them who were won over appear to have been attracted by the promise of a speedy peace, although

Keep in Power

they were not nearly so tired of the war as the soldiers.

They have on several occasions been at variance with the Soviet Government and have been a great thorn in their side, never once have they really lost their independence, and they have formed their own Soviet. The Bolsheviks were always afraid of the navy, and invariably at last gave them anything they wanted. When I was last in Petrograd the sailors seemed to have sadly degenerated. All their time seemed to be occupied in making themselves as comfortable as they could. They used openly to boast that no matter who was starving, they would not go short; they were quite sure the Bolsheviks would be compelled to feed them in order to avoid trouble.

The navy cannot be described as an active help to the Bolsheviks; it simply takes what good things can be got and in exchange refrains from active hostility.

Although the army had so many privileges there was a considerable amount of dissatisfaction and a feeling that they were being used for dirty work. In October

How the Bolsheviks

last I met lots of young conscripts returning home who said they would refuse to serve, I met them in one of the outer districts. They told me that they had arranged amongst themselves not to fight in any case for the Soviets, but would, on the contrary, if possible fight against them.

Conscription is a hateful thing, and I have been very surprised at some of the Labour people I have seen who are fighting conscription in England taking so little notice of conscription in Soviet Russia.

Surely it cannot be wrong to have conscription in Eng'land and right for the Bolsheviks to have it in Russia ; anyway, the reasoning is beyond me.

On one occasion I slept at a farmhouse where some twelve or fourteen conscripts of the Red Army had requested a night's lodging. They took no notice of me and, I suppose, concluded I was asleep. They laid down, talking to each other for about three hours before they eventually got to sleep, and as I was interested I listened attentively to all they had to say. The whole of the conversation was the contrasting of conditions in the towns and

Keep in Power

villages before the Bolshevik revolution and now. Some of them it appeared had worked in Moscow and Petrograd as "down-trodden workers," and yet were telling each other of the fine times they had had then. I was genuinely surprised; they were typical members of the Red Army to whom I should never have ventured to say anything disparaging of the Soviets. Their sincerity was beyond doubt; they were merely talking quietly and frankly amongst themselves. From all I heard I concluded that most of their friends and comrades felt the same as they did.

I did not get up in the morning until they had left, and I doubt if they even saw me; the corner where I lay was very dark, there being only one very small lamp in the place. They left before the morning light appeared.

This was not the only occasion on which I have heard similar outspoken criticisms—women especially were always protesting, sometimes they were the only people who would dare to say anything.

Among civilians, of course, the attitude towards Bolshevism was far more hostile.

How the Bolsheviks

There never was a time when the majority were Bolsheviks. The strength was much more in the daring of the leaders and that relatively small portion of the Red Army who had been infected with the doctrines of Bolshevism before they had seen it at work. To call the Bolshevik Government a Dictatorship of the Proletariate is a perversion of the truth. It is a dictatorship right enough, but the dictators are a small minority, the bulk of the people being untouched by the principles. What the Bolsheviks have got is a majority of the politically active, a very different thing from a majority of the people.

Even their own Commissars were often against them, and would show their hostility if there was a chance to do so. People were always contrasting the present times with the time of the Tsar. I have personally heard Commissars doing so, yet these were the men who were getting all the possible privileges out of Bolshevism.

It is this known hostility which accounts for the infamous army of spies, yet no one who knows Russia could imagine anybody

Keep in Power

wanting the days of the Tsar back unless things were very bad indeed.

Among workmen, the very kind of men Bolshevism was supposed specially to benefit, there is nothing but hostility induced by the long-drawn-out struggle to get food and the hopeless feeling of insecurity.

Only Bolshevik papers are allowed to be printed, and one would think that supporters would be found among those employed in the production of these papers. This is not so. Last December I happened to be in the printing works of the *Red Gazette* in Petrograd. This paper is popularly considered to be the reddest of them all; every employee has papers to show he is an out and out Bolshevik.

I talked to several of the workmen in different departments and had further talks whilst we walked home together. Publicly they talked as though they were keen supporters of the Bolsheviks, but it was easy to discover that they loathed the whole business. A little later I taxed one of the employees with the fact that they were not Bolsheviks at all and after a slight

How the Bolsheviks

hesitation and a careful turning round to see that no one was within earshot, he admitted it was quite true and added that in his opinion it would be difficult to find one real Bolshevik amongst all the genuine workers in Petrograd.

The suppression of all newspapers except those which are Bolshevik is a more terrible weapon in Russia than it would be in England. I have heard many complaints that the Press in England has not been used to tell the truth, but I can hardly conceive of a time when only a particular kind of Socialist paper would be allowed to appear.

Such papers as the *Labour Leader* and the *Daily Herald* would have been at once suppressed in Russia as being counter-revolutionary; both of them write, and write vigorously, about Freedom and Liberty, this would be regarded as treason by the Bolsheviks. Papers which belonged to the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries were suppressed and have not been allowed to appear since.

All the tales told by supporters of the Bolsheviks will not dispose of this fact.

Keep in Power

I lived and worked in Soviet Russia and was naturally anxious to read news of the outside world, but was never allowed for the greater part of 1918 the privilege of reading a newspaper which was not under the direct control of the Bolsheviks.

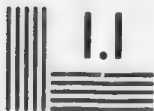
In the villages, conditions were often quite good, due to the forming of a local Soviet by the inhabitants who were not Bolshevik. The villagers elected the men whom they knew, and as long as they were left alone things proceeded much as usual.

Soon, however, a whisper would reach the district Commissar that the Soviet was not politically straight, he would then come with some Red soldiers and dissolve the Committee and order another election, often importing Bolshevik supporters from the towns, and these men the villagers were instructed to elect as their committee. Resistance was often made and an army of Red Guards sent to break it down. Pitched battles often took place, and in one case of which I can speak from personal knowledge twenty-one of the inhabitants were shot, including the local telegraph girl



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

How Bolsheviks Keep in Power

operator who had refused to telegraph for reinforcements.

The practice of sending young soldiers into the villages which were not Bolshevik was very general ; care was taken to send men who did not come from the district, so that any scruples might be overcome. Even then it would happen that after the soldiers had got food they would make friends with the people, and so compel the Commissar to send for another set of Red Guards.

It would puzzle the wit of man to find methods of mental and physical terrorism which the Bolsheviks have not used in pursuit of an ideal.

CHAPTER IX

BOLSHEVISM AND SOCIAL LIFE

HOUSE COMMITTEES

HOUSE Committees were formed immediately after the March Revolution ; they were elected by the inhabitants of the House for the purpose of maintaining order, enlisting a voluntary militia and working as a kind of co-operative society to supply the tenants with most of the necessities of life, such as food, boots and clothes, at the lowest possible price.

The necessity for the militia was due to the hooligan elements taking advantage of the temporary dislocation of the machine of civil government.

The looting of wine and spirit cellars was a daily occurrence, generally finishing up with a regular battle to the accompaniment of machine-guns, and even armoured

Bolshevism and Social Life

cars were brought into play. The house in which I lived was once besieged for three days on end, and we were only able to steal out for provisions during the lulls in the fighting. Several tenants in our house were killed by stray shots, and in one case it was the mother of six children who suffered. After a time this kind of thing ceased, although there were a number of isolated instances where hooliganism persisted.

I was on one occasion in a restaurant—the Bristol on the Nevsky—when a sailor and a soldier quarrelled. The sailor drew his Browning pistol and fired; he was so drunk that he could not aim, and he missed his opponent and shot a poor fellow dead who was sitting some ten yards away. This sailor belonged to the rougher element among the soldiers and sailors, who were always a great source of trouble and who boasted as early as May or June, 1917, that they would soon take all Petrograd. No one cared to tackle them, and this sailor, who was shouting and brandishing his revolver, was merely asked by the trembling manager to leave. He did so

Bolshevism and Social Life

after a time, threatening to shoot anyone who touched him. The House Committee had to cope with these troubles and go on with the constructive side of their work. Tenants would complain that their flat wanted repairing, that a pump was wanted to raise the water to the upper flats—all kinds of requests were made, and in most cases the things were done. Altogether it was a time of hope and great things seemed possible in the future.

After the Bolsheviks took possession of Petrograd they immediately disarmed the House Militia, in many cases the militia was very roughly handled by the soldiers and sailors who had taken possession of the old police stations.

Their next effort was to secure control of the House Committees, and in some cases they were successful. Our own house, among many others, stood out and kept their own committee for quite a long time.

It was not possible to do this openly, the Bolsheviks appointed the head porter and made him the president or chairman of the committees, which were later on merged into poverty committees. Only

Bolshevism and Social Life

first category workmen and signed Bolsheviks were allowed to sit on the committee, and if they had carried out the endless decrees which they were supposed to administer life would have been intolerable. Fortunately, they carried out as few as they could and so left us with many loopholes by which we could steal a little liberty.

All arrangements were in their hands, including the giving out of the food cards. As a rule, they were not hostile to the first category workman unless he criticised them, but to the *bourgeoisie* they were an ever-present menace, they spied upon all his movements, his visitors and his visible expenditure. Should anything arouse the suspicion of any member of the House Committee or indeed, for the matter of that, any of the poorer or less educated tenants of the house, a hint would bring a dozen or more soldiers to search his flat. The mental torture of these people must have been terrible.

Originally the House Committee had started a kind of co-operative shop in the house. It was a big job to supply all the

Bolshevism and Social Life

tenants ; in our house, for instance, more than 1,200 people lived, there were 100 flats and nearly 100 single rooms. This part of the work was carried on as long as possible, but by November last most of them had ceased to function, simply because there were no stocks.

Children went to school almost entirely for the meals, for although the curriculum was enlarged and liberalised, neither teachers nor children had sufficient food to enable them to teach or be taught.

It seems impossible for me to get away from this food question ; even the Poverty Committees appointed by the Bolsheviks were often compelled to buy from the vendors of smuggled food. In the Winter Palace itself, where our studios and offices were situated, in the same suite of rooms the Tsar had previously occupied, the various assistants were starving. A magnificent palace, enormous wages—in paper money—in a land where admittedly there is plenty of food, more than enough for all, and—starvation, literal starvation.

Bolshevism and Social Life

RELIGION AND THE CALENDAR

Among the early decrees of the Bolsheviks was the official abolition, so to speak, of the Church, the abolition of all Church festivals and the institution of a new Calendar. The Calendar was brought into line with Western dates, the Russians never having accepted the Western alteration. It was proposed to call the first year of the Soviet the year One. Many wanted to call it the First Year of Lenin, but apparently this was too much.

All church marriages were abolished and civil marriage instituted. This, although popular with the younger men in the Red Army, was looked on with disgust by the Orthodox, who, it must be remembered, number at least four-fifths of the population.

The priests were deprived of most of their property and all their incomes. The house in which they lived was nationalised, and in most cases they were given one or two rooms elsewhere and allowed to take some of their furniture. How they managed to live is a puzzle ; they could, of course, go to forced labour and they

Bolshevism and Social Life

would derive a little income from alms and collections or payments made for blessing the houses—an old Russian custom.

In the villages they did a little better, being allowed in most cases to keep some of their land on which they could work.

Even in villages many suffered because it was alleged they hoarded food. They probably did the same as the other village folk, and would have been only too glad to exchange their food for something of use ; even a priest cannot live on paper money. To celebrate the October coup of the Bolsheviks last year, monuments were erected everywhere in front of cathedrals, churches and large buildings. These monuments were built with a framework of wood covered with canvas and printed in most cases to resemble stone. By December they had become very moth-eaten from the action of wind and weather.

At Christmas time, old style, I remember a bold sermon being preached in the morning in a church in Petrograd. The place was crowded with people, mainly poor women, praying for deliverance from their distress and misery. The preacher

Bolshevism and Social Life

constantly referred to the monuments "erected by our persecutors." His theme was that they would soon pass away like their canvas monuments, but the Church, in spite of all, would remain.

I have no personal views on the matter, although at the time I was more than impressed by the attitude of the pleading women, and of the courage of this priest, who must have been aware that the sermon would certainly cost him his life.

TRANSPORT AND POSTAL SERVICE

The postal service can be dismissed in a sentence ; for all practical purposes it does not exist for the mass of the people and only works in a hopeless form for the Soviets themselves. I sent eighteen letters from Vologda to Petrograd during the autumn of 1918. One was delivered. During the month of December I never saw a single postman in Petrograd. The railway service is very bad. One or two trains each day is the maximum on the best line in all Russia, that from Moscow to Petrograd. On other lines, it often

Bolshevism and Social Life

happens that no train at all is run. What I have previously written explains most of the reasons ; a minor but not less annoying cause of the delay is the constant stopping and searching of the passengers. This is carried out in a most leisurely fashion, time, of course, being of no importance to the Red Guards or the Commissar. The whole system has completely broken down.

River transport, which is a more important feature in Russia than in most countries, is in an even more deplorable state. In the summer of last year I waited for the daily boat near Totma on the Sookhona river for four days, and friends of mine have waited for more than a week. In the year before two or three boats a day were running. The trouble here is of the kind that has stopped the factories.

The fleet of steamers, really fine steamers, many built in the United States, are now controlled, like the others, by Soviets. The actual committee is known as the Sailors' Committee of the Northern Russia Volunteer Fleet.

Endless trouble is caused by ever-present suspicion that some member of the crew

Bolshevism and Social Life

is a counter-revolutionary or helping them in some way. The boats are constantly being held up in order that a search of both crew and passengers may be made.

There is nothing wrong with the boats, they are in good condition, fuel exists in plenty and the engineers remain. A blight has descended on the workmen and they cannot work.

CONCLUSION

I have no desire to put forward any personal suggestions with reference to what ought to be done.

This at any rate I do know, that whilst the people in England and allied countries are discussing pros and cons and searching for the perfect policy, the poor workmen in Russia are starving to death, so helpless that they are unable by themselves to make their cry for help heard above the heated discussions which are being carried on around them.

I have done my best to give a careful, and as far as possible an impartial, account of what I have seen, and have not written

Bolshevism and Social Life

anything the truth of which I am not prepared to demonstrate.

What can be done to help is for the people in England and the allied countries to decide, but to my fellow workmen I should like to say that Russia, now more urgently than ever, needs the services of all the skilled workmen who can be spared. There is room and work for all who care to go in the spirit of brotherly help. If workmen from the allied countries could go and teach the Russians how to make and work their own machines they might do more to make the Russian really independent and able to govern and manage their own magnificent country than all the decrees and political formulas that were ever invented.

They need help in every kind of way, a sprinkling of English workmen who know something of the practical working of trade unions, for instance, could do more to help the Russians to master the art of self-government than a whole army of theoretical idealists. If they went really to help there is no country where they would be more welcome. All the English

Bolshevism and Social Life

people I ever met in Russia agreed upon this, that there are no better friends than the Russians once you know them.

When I left Petrograd last January the population had dwindled down to 700,000. A year and a half before under the Provisional Government it was over 2,400,000. You ask how I know. Well, the number of ration cards issued by the Bolsheviks were published each month in their own paper; since no one could live without a ration card—which besides being needed to obtain food, when there is any, serves also as a sort of passport—it must be obvious that the number of people is no greater than the number of cards issued, and as some, by trickery of various kinds, managed to get two cards, it was probably considerably less. Even this comparatively small population when I left was going through all the horrors of slow starvation. The situation was indeed terrible.

APPENDIX

THE THEORY OF BOLSHEVISM

BY E. H. HAYWOOD

IN the preceding chapters a good deal has been said of the actual practice of the Bolshevik Government and the Bolsheviks in general. This little book would hardly be complete without some attempt to explain the aims of Bolshevism so far as they can be understood through the medium of an English mind. Here lies the preliminary difficulty. Words may be exactly the same, they may appear to have a very definite meaning, yet it will be found in practice that the media will alter the whole picture.

In England we have become so used to a sense of personal freedom, to say our own say, to read what we will, that we cannot conceive of any democracy, no matter how revolutionary, where all these

The Theory of Bolshevism

things are not assumed as an integral part of the ideal. The fact that personal liberty has become lessened during the war and that this lessening has only been submitted to because of a belief in its necessity has heightened, if anything, an invincible conviction that the Bolshevik revolution is essentially a blow for liberty. So strong is this assumption that it is only with an effort that even those who are opposed to the philosophy of Bolshevism can credit the fact that all trace of personal liberty has been deliberately and avowedly destroyed. When the freshly elected Constituent Assembly was forcibly prevented from meeting after the Bolshevik coup, there were loud complaints from all the quarters which had been most active in the making of the March revolution. The supporters of the Bolsheviks were themselves a little confused, it seemed a strange way to begin an era of freedom. The answer of the Bolshevik apologist is that anyone who blames them for this proceeding "may be a good Democrat, but he is a very bad Socialist."

In neither England nor the United

The Theory of Bolshevism

States would any revolutionary party, no matter how strong was the pull towards its theoretical ideal, have the ghost of a chance to obtain power even for an experiment, unless it assumed at least as high a standard of personal liberty as that which at present exists.

The Civil Liberties group in both England and the United States would quickly put an end to any pretensions of dictatorship in the realm of matters strictly personal. It would not be possible for a single day to disguise a naked tyranny with such high sounding names as "The People's Committee," or "The Council of the People's Commissaries."

In Russia no undue importance is attached to so vital a matter. The reason is mainly historical. Except for the few months between the first great revolution, March, 1917, and the Bolshevik coup in November of the same year, the average Russian never had a chance to know what personal liberty meant.

Down to 1863 the mass of the people who live in what is now Bolshevik Russia were serfs, tied to the soil, and were only

The Theory of Bolshevism

able to go to the towns to work, or to leave their village to be married, with the consent of the landowner.

The very idea of personal liberty cannot grow under such conditions. The story of the thousands of exiles to Siberia, to foreign lands, to the dungeons of Moscow and Petrograd, is the story of a handful of choice spirits who each in his own way tried to win freedom both for himself and his fellows. These were the Kropotkins and Stepniaks, who lived as exiles in England and whose whole life-work was an effort to obtain freedom for Russians. Irony of ironies ! Every man of this type is now called a Reactionary or a Counter-Revolutionary by the Bolshevik prophets of light.

The mass of the people have never made any concerted struggle to win freedom. How could they ? It would appear to them in much the same way as the struggle of an Englishman to secure a country house in Mars.

Freedom is not a thing which can be given ; it must be won. When it is won it requires a very high standard of social

The Theory of Bolshevism

education to appreciate its full flavour. There is yet another difficulty. In March, 1917, the news of the Russian revolution came like a flash of lightning into a world dark with the menace of a long-continued war, the end of which no man could foresee. The people in England were thorough in their belief that the war was being waged for freedom. Here was an instalment on account.

Few were really happy in having the Tsar and his Government as an ally, it was a case of "misfortune making strange bedfellows." There was a silent reserve about this part of our engagements which helped to add to the blaze of joy which burst into open expression when it became known that we were no longer entangled in such an incongruous alliance. I remember very vividly the soldiers in my own regiment throwing up their caps in sheer abandon when the news first came through ; the wine of life tingled in one's veins.

The exhilaration of this episode has never quite left us ; in a numbed kind of way we like to assume that the Bolshevik

The Theory of Bolshevism

revolution is simply the ordered, natural and logical sequence.

Certainly the English democracy does not want to believe hardly of a people which in two days overthrew the organised oppression of centuries. It may here be interpolated that none of the known Bolshevik leaders were in Russia when the great revolution broke out. Lenin was in Switzerland, Trotsky was in the United States and most of the others were away from Russia. This is admitted by M. Litvinoff in a brochure published by the British Socialist Party, entitled "The Bolshevik Revolution."

If, then, it is possible for an Englishman to conceive of an ideal which does not include personal liberty, and will drive away the subconscious thought that the Bolshevik was the man who overthrew the Tsar, we can go on to try to describe the aims of Bolshevism.

The word means the "majority." According to M. Litvinoff, "It was coined after the first split of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903, when the more moderate wing was left in a minority and

The Theory of Bolshevism

the revolutionary wing gained a majority of votes."

The name of Bolshevism is thus comparatively new, although the ideas which are at the back of it formed the basis of the illusion of Bakunin and the Blankists.

The illusion was that you would by a coup escape a whole chapter in the history of industrial development. Marx had taught in his gospel of scientific socialism the necessity of passing through the capitalist stage, and was one of the most active in pointing out the illusion of expecting success for a socialist commonwealth until the industrial side had been efficiently developed.

There were special reasons why some Russian Socialists thought that a way of escape was possible ; capitalism was only in the primitive stage in Russia and had very few strong roots.

The seductiveness of this thought did tempt a number of idealists into abandoning the preliminary struggle for civil rights in favour of a revolution which would place the proletariat in position and authority without waiting.

The Theory of Bolshevism

Few who thought the matter out believed in such an illusion, the brutal fact being that you cannot carry on any Government without skilled administrators or obtain the assent of any large body of people to your being the Government unless they have confidence in your administrative ability as well as a belief in your policy and ideals.

This is the historic reason for association with the *bourgeoisie* in a struggle to win civil liberty and representative institutions.

Representative institutions cannot live unless they have power, independence and responsibility; once they have achieved these it is possible to train the skilled staff which is wanted to run a people's government.

Russia is probably the poorest country in Europe in the number of men and women who are competent to run the engine of the State; skilled workmen of all kinds are few and far between, we have probably more skilled administrators in any one of our large trade unions than exist in all Soviet Russia. Without criticising the communist ideal for the moment,

The Theory of Bolshevism

it would not be unreasonable to say that men who presumed to accept the responsibility of governing a whole nation with the foreknowledge that no staff was available to carry out even an ideal must be either fanatics or scamps. It is inviting the breakdown of the whole social structure and is bound to result in disaster for all concerned: it is as though a shoemaker had undertaken to perform a surgical operation for his friend and killed him in the doing of it.

The theory of the Bolshevik is that a Socialist Commonwealth giving economic freedom and equality to all can be established at any stage of society if the machine of State can be captured. There being no parliamentary institutions through which it could be captured, it would be a waste of time to try to create them and be faced with the prospect of further waiting.

The whole business could be done through a Dictatorship, the dictatorship of the proletariat. This dictatorship is to break through all opposition and make the position of the *bourgeoisie* so impossible that it would never raise its head

The Theory of Bolshevism

again. The *bourgeoisie* must be struck down, not because of any special crime committed against the proletariat, but simply because they were the living agents of the capitalist *régime*.

In a word, Bolshevism is the policy of the short cut.

The dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, like all other dictatorships, soon resolves itself into a dictatorship of the populace by the military with the usual paraphernalia of conscription and spying. It is an odd way of overthrowing one despotism by imposing another in which the machinery of the old one is faithfully copied by its successor.

By a strange chance, it seems to be thought that a dictatorship of a majority of people is a less burdensome thing than any other kind of dictatorship. A dictatorship, no matter under what guise it appears, is a deadly blow at the first principles of civil liberty. If one is going to be hanged, it is little satisfaction to be told that the rope will be made of silk instead of the usual hemp ; the result will be much the same in either case.

The Theory of Bolshevism

Those people who want dictatorships deserve them, but their wanting such a thing takes away any moral right of opposing other forms of dictatorship. Numbers do not make a thing right or wrong.

If a dictatorship of the proletariat was in fact a dictatorship of all workmen and peasants, then, except to the *bourgeoisie*, nothing would happen, because all would dictate to each other and cancel out a mutual holiday of dictatorships. Like all such specious plans, it has become—indeed was never anything else—but a dictatorship of a few men over the mass of people, bribing them with a right to suppress the other classes and having to pay in exchange with a bondage to those who hold the reins.

A dictatorship which does not dictate is lumber; a dictatorship which does dictate is tyranny, no matter by what high-sounding names it is disguised.

A word should be said on the question of Communism. The ideal is an exalted one, so exalted that few people can hope to attain it. Those who possibly might do so are just those who would fear to

The Theory of Bolshevism

embark on so troublous a sea without the most careful thought and selection of the kind of persons who could share the communism with them.

It is precisely because it calls for the highest of man's virtues that so many promising attempts have failed. The first asset that is necessary is a sense of proportion and a sympathetic understanding which must be equal to the sum total of the possible powers possessed by each individual in the commune. If this is not possessed the result would work out that a standard would be set which would be much lower than that of the man just above the average.

Among the notes which Mr. Keeling gave me, and which it was not possible to use in the text, was the report of a conversation between two Soviet Deputies whilst all three were on a river boat. One argued that no matter whether a man was industrious or idle their wages and their privileges must remain the same. The second demurred and said, "Some way ought to be found to differentiate." The first answered with unimpeachable

The Theory of Bolshevism

logic, "That it was the only way equality could be maintained for, if you penalise idleness, the industrious will eventually become better off than the other, a position we could never allow." Mr. Keeling adds, "Unless I had heard the conversation myself, I would never have believed it possible."

It would be difficult to express Bolshevism in clearer words than those used by the deputy on the boat.

Before you can have Communism you have first of all to get Communists; these are not made by a christening, they are not produced by simply joining a political organisation, and are certainly not obtained by being compelled to sign a paper saying that they are such, on pain of losing the ration card.

This is the root fallacy. Communism can only hope to have a chance to be successful among people who have forbearance, an absence of self and an educated sense of responsible personal restraint. To start with any other kind of raw material is to invite disaster and find your ideal swamped by the least idealist

The Theory of Bolshevism

section in the community. This is what has happened in Russia. Instead of the idealists controlling the State, the idealists themselves are controlled by forces which they had the power to start but which are now the masters.

The machine of Government has broken down because the agents lack both the faith and the technical skill. If the faith was widely held the lack of skill might be overcome ; the result of the absence of both is that a whole people are starving in a land which but yesterday exported food to the people of this country.

Apart from the failure in the economic structure, there is the complete despising and ignoring of civil liberty, there is no need to reason the matter out. The Bolsheviks having frankly agreed that a Bolshevik Dictatorship means exactly what it says. There is no room for anyone other than a Bolshevik. In England such a position could hardly be won except over the dead bodies of that section of the Socialist movement which attaches some importance to the idea of personal liberty.

what
of the
alists
which
h are

roken
the
faith
night
ace of
ng in
food

homic
pising
is no
The
hat a
y what
nyone
l such
except
of the
some
liberty.